

4682 Huron Hill Drive
Okemos, MI 48864
September 15, 2016

Dear Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

I request your strong support for three bills concerning bicycle safety: a minimum passing distance, education, and protection for vulnerable users.

I have been a driver for 35 years, and bicyclist for longer than that. I have lived in Okemos since 2012 with my wife and our two sons. We chose to live here because the schools are so good and the community is wholesome. For four years I was a professor of psychology at MSU. I now work for a start-up company (Knack) in a scientific and executive capacity.

I want environmentally-friendly, low-cost transportation to be a viable option for my family and community. For four years I commuted to MSU almost exclusively by bicycle and CATA bus.

I believe that bicyclists help make the roads safer for all users. They can see things that are hard to notice from a motor vehicle. I reported three such hazards on SeeClickFix.com. Another time, I was commuting home by bicycle, and a half-sheet of plywood was in the road at the intersection of Farm Lane and Mt. Hope at rush hour. I stopped to remove it from the roadway. There were dozens of cars stopped at the light; everyone saw the hazard, but I was the only person to do something. One person in a car rolled down their window and thanked me. I have stopped a half-dozen times or more to remove bolts and other stray chunks of metal from the road. I have never stopped my car to do this kind of thing. From a bike, it is easier to notice and take action.

It goes without saying that I want my family members to be safe while driving or riding a bike, whether for fun or to work, school, shopping, or a friend's house. I always wear a helmet while riding a bike, and insist that my family members do so for every ride without exception. While in a car, I always wear a seatbelt and insist that passengers do so when I am driving.

It is important to me that my family is healthy and active. Riding a bicycle can help. A few minutes a day riding to school, library, or work is a great way to get a little exercise as part of the day--and can be faster as well.

It is important to me that my own children become good drivers. Driving is an important skill, and involves some risk and considerable responsibility. My older son learned to drive here in Okemos. My younger son will start learning next year. I want them to be excellent drivers. It would be horrible if they were to die in a car, or if they were to kill or seriously injure someone. I want them to drive carefully around bicycles, and ride safely around cars.

For exercise and recreation, I enjoy bicycling. Over the last few years, I have ridden 1000s of recreational miles on Michigan roads. For the last couple years, I have participated in long-distance, self-supported cycling rides organized by the Detroit Randonneurs. I have also developed 5 such routes in Michigan for other people to enjoy. It's a great way to see the state.

A year ago, I was hit by a car while riding my bicycle on Eden Road, between Leslie and Mason. This was about 6pm on a sunny summer Saturday (July 18, 2015). I was riding safely on the pavement at the edge of the road. The driver was distracted, and simply ran into me from behind. I fell hard onto the pavement on my left side, breaking my left collarbone and losing skin from both arms and hands. My head hit the pavement, but my helmet protected me. I spent several days in hospital, followed by surgery a few weeks later (to implant a metal support so the collarbone could heal). My bicycle was a total loss. The driver was entirely at fault, and was ticketed for Failure to yield. It took 5 months for the collar bone to heal, and a few more months to regain full use of my arm.

Like many people, I feel sad and angry that so many bicyclists have been maimed and killed by automobile drivers on Michigan roads.

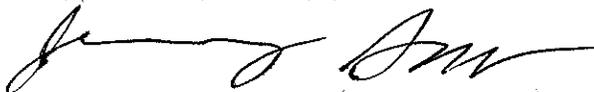
As a citizen, father, driver, and bicyclist, I think the law can help make the roads safer and roadway expectations clearer, for both bicyclists and motorists. There are three bills that are before the Michigan Senate that I urge you to support.

1. Safe passing law. A responsible driver will naturally want to pass every cyclist with at least 5 feet of space. He or she will wait to pass until that much space is available, and not try to squeeze by. It is not only careful, it is respectful. The best analogy that I have seen of what it's like to be on a bike and passed from behind by a car is a train platform: You don't want to stand within a few feet of a train that is zipping through the station. On a bike, it is scary to be passed by someone who comes too close to you. If you can reach out with your arm and touch the car, it's way too close. Things can be sticking out from cars or trucks. Codifying a minimum passing distance is important for communicating safety expectations to all road users. This will save lives, and reduce confrontations.

2. Education law. Most people want to do the right thing, and will generally obey the law. A law that no one knows about is not nearly as useful or protective as it could be. Not everyone is familiar with our current laws; even some law enforcement officers are not fully informed about the law as it pertains to bicycles. Education helps establish shared knowledge and assumptions about what is normal. A disturbing number of drivers are unaware of the basic rights of bicyclists on the road. A few people view bicyclists as somehow illegitimate, as cheating or taking advantage of roads that are supposedly for cars only. People on bicycles are dehumanized, seen as less than equal, leading to road rage, passing closely on purpose, and so on. Education can help.

3. Vulnerable roadway user law. Protecting those who need it most is an important function of the legal system. Asymmetries of vulnerability are recognized in many areas. People who are exercising their basic right to use public infrastructure—whether on bicycles, wheelchairs, and so on—deserve legal protection.

Respectfully,



Jeremy R. Gray, Ph.D.