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FRIEDMAN’S ‘ZERO TRAFFIC FATALITIES TASK FORCE’ REPORT LAUNCHES SAFE STREETS LEGISLATION

SACRAMENTO – This week, the findings of the ‘Zero Traffic Fatalities Task Force’ were released in a report by the California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA). The task force was created by Assembly Bill 2363, legislation authored by Assemblymember Laura Friedman (D-Glendale) in 2018. The task force was charged with exploring ways to reduce traffic-related injuries, fatalities, and speed across the state.

“It is gratifying to see my work in the legislature put into action,” said Assemblymember Friedman. “We all want the streets and roads we use every day to be safer, and yet for decades, our efforts to improve safety and reduce traffic-related fatalities have been hampered by antiquated rules at the state level. With this report, we have a roadmap drafted by experts to guide us towards safer streets in every community.”

Starting in June of 2019, the task force began reviewing California’s current methodology for setting speed limits, existing speed reduction policies, engineering recommendations to increase safety, existing reports and data, as well as the impact that bicycle and pedestrian usage have on traffic safety.

Members of the task force included representatives from the California Highway Patrol, Department of Transportation, Department of Public Health, academic institutions, local governments, bicycle safety organizations, road safety organizations, and labor organizations.

“San Jose appreciates the leadership of Assemblymember Friedman in the creation of the task force, and CalSTA’s report that highlights a direct connection between vehicle speed and the severity of injuries and death on our roadways,” said Laura Wells, Assistant Director of the City of San Jose Transportation Department and a member of the task force. “San Jose’s experience demonstrates this connection, and we hope to quickly move toward new policies that allow us to set safe speeds and to use proven technology to combat traffic violence.”

According to the task force report, nearly 3,600 people die each year in traffic crashes in California and more than 13,000 people are severely injured. In the City of Glendale alone in 2017, 755 individuals were either killed or injured in crashes according to the Office of Traffic Safety, with speed a factor in 109 cases.

The report is the first step taken in decades towards reforming the way California regulates vehicular speeds. The methodology used by California and many other states was developed in the late 1930s and uses traffic surveys to calculate the speed at which 85% of vehicles travel on a given road to set the speed limit for that roadway, with limited flexibility for communities to adjust for road conditions, pedestrians, bicyclists, or other non-vehicular traffic.

"The current rules create a vicious cycle where speed limits increase because drivers are speeding. It would be like increasing a person's daily-recommended calories because their neighbors overeat. Cities like Los Angeles need the flexibility to set speed limits that fit," said Seleta Reynolds, General Manager of the Los Angeles Department of Transportation. "We were grateful for the opportunity to participate in this groundbreaking work and look forward to championing these recommendations that, if implemented, will save lives."

In response to the task force's findings, Assemblymember Friedman has introduced Assembly Bill 2121, legislation that would put many of their recommendations into law. With the bill, Friedman aims to create a pathway for California's cities to promote safer travel and work to reduce traffic collisions.

AB 2121 provides greater flexibility to local governments when calculating speed limits along a section of roadway if there is found to be an uptick in traffic-related crashes. In addition, the bill creates a statewide traffic safety monitoring program to identify locations with pedestrian- and bicyclist-related crashes, and requires the Department of Transportation to convene a committee of external design experts to advise the Department on revisions to the Highway Design Manual.

"Fatal and severe crashes are a public health crisis," said Assemblymember Friedman. "We know that speed can be a major factor in traffic fatalities, and it's time that we bring traffic safety into the 21st Century and give communities the power to respond with proven tools to improve safety for everyone."

"The way we move around has changed over the years and continues to evolve even today. It's time to empower local leaders with the ability to improve road safety based on today's conditions. This flexibility will help save lives and reduce the number of injuries," said Assemblymember Phil Ting (D-San Francisco), joint author of AB 2121.

AB 2121 will face its first test in Assembly in April.

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Laura Friedman represents the 43rd Assembly District which encompasses the cities of Burbank, Glendale, and La Cañada Flintridge, as well as the communities of La Crescenta and Montrose, and the Los Angeles neighborhoods of Atwater Village, Beachwood Canyon, Los Feliz, East Hollywood, Franklin Hills, and Silver Lake.