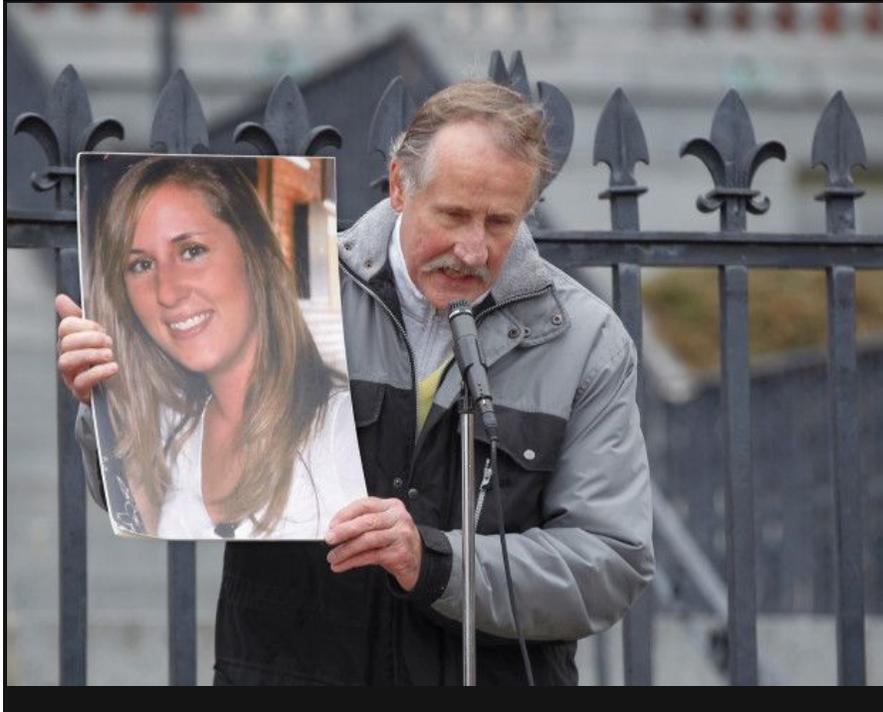


# Safety advocates press for legislators to finally pass hands-free driving bill



BOSTON, MA – NOVEMBER 17-SUNDAY: Richard Curren, right, of Cambridge, hugs his friend Ed Marakovitz, left, of Somerville, after addressing attendees to a rally in support of distracted driving legislation at the State House November 17, 2019, in Boston, Massachusetts. (Photo by Paul Connors/Media News Group/Boston Herald)

By [ERIN TIERNAN](#) | November 17, 2019 at 8:18 pm



BOSTON, MA - NOVEMBER 17-SUNDAY: Tom Brannelly, of Norwood, holds a photo of his late daughter Katie Brannelly while addressing attendees during a rally in support of distracted driving legislation at the State House November 17, 2019, in Boston, Massachusetts. (Photo by Paul Connors/Media News Group/Boston Herald)

Two days after lawmakers announced they'd reached an agreement on a hands-free driving bill, road safety advocates stood in front of the State House to recite the names of 72 victims of roadway crashes in Massachusetts and urge lawmakers to finally pass the legislation that is more than 10 years in the making.

"We have been seeing an increase in roadway injuries and fatalities," said Stacy Thompson of Liveable Streets. "We need to stop distracted driving."

A hands-free bill has been battered around in the House and Senate for a decade and advocates said they are hopeful that this year will finally bring a change in the law — Massachusetts is the last of the New England states to adopt a ban on drivers using their phones while operating a vehicle.

Thompson told a crowd of about 100 who gathered to remember the victims of roadway crashes that getting legislation passed is “critical” to reducing pedestrian and cyclist injuries and fatalities.

Richard Curran lost his wife, Sharon Hamer, in a crash two months ago when she was struck by a truck while walking in Harvard Square. He spoke of a “wonderful mother and wife” who loved Christmas but will never be able to make more holiday memories with her family and he called on legislators to act to hopefully prevent more deaths of people like her.

“They deserve to live. They should not have died,” he said. “When its dangerous to cross the road or ride a bike in our cities and towns, something is wrong.”

“I’m tired of wondering who we will bury next,” said the Rev. Laura Everett, who recently had a bicycle crash of her own when a driver opened their car door into a bike lane.

Thompson, Curran, Everett and other road-safety advocates called on legislators to pass the bill this week and put it in the governor’s hands by Friday. But what the legislation looks like remains to be seen.

The House and Senate both passed versions of the hands-free bills this year but with a key differences in what data would be collected by police, which has blocked the bill from becoming law so far.

The House version would require police to keep track of data from stops that end in citations, while the Senate version would require demographic data to be recorded for every distracted-driving stop regardless of whether a citation is issued. Under the Senate version, much of the the data would be publicly accessible.

A committee has been working since June to reconcile the two bills and on Friday Rep. William Straus and Sen. Joseph Boncore, who co-chair the six-member conference

committee, announced that an agreement had been reached. The lawmakers however declined to go into specifics before the agreement is signed by all committee members.

Thompson said her organization supports “some level” of data collection and said the most important thing is getting a law in place that will make streets safer for cyclists and pedestrians.