

# Vigil to end motor vehicle crashes highlights safety measures, distracted driving legislation on Beacon Hill

By **Jordan Frias** Globe Correspondent, November 17, 2019, 8:39 p.m.



Emily Stein, president of the Safe Roads Alliance, placed yellow flowers on the steps of the State House on Sunday. ERIN CLARK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

About 100 people stood in the cold outside the State House Sunday afternoon to hear from grieving family members who have lost loved ones in crashes. Among them was a Cambridge man who lost his wife two months ago.

Richard Curran remembered how his wife, Sharon Hamer, had loved the movie “It’s a Wonderful Life” and what that said about her.

“[The film’s] all about family and friends — for Sharon, that was the most important thing in life: family and friends,” Curran said.

Sharon, who was 67, was walking through Harvard Square on the morning of Sept. 17, when she was hit and killed by a boom truck.

Curran told those who were grieving in the crowd that their loved ones “deserve to live. Just like Sharon, they deserve to live.”

“They should not have died,” he said. “And when it’s dangerous to cross the street or ride a bike in our cities and towns, something is wrong.”

Several others shared similar stories of loss as part of the fifth annual World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims memorial vigil held in Boston. Hundreds of yellow flowers were placed on the State House steps after the vigil in remembrance of those injured or killed in crashes so

far this year. Members of the Massachusetts Vision Zero Coalition, which organized the vigil, have been advocating for the passage of hands-free legislation to prevent distracted driving.

Late Friday, a conference report on the bill, expected to be filed Monday, was approved by members of the House and the Senate to be reviewed this week by state legislators.

Stacy Thompson, director of the Livable Streets Alliance, said groups like hers are “optimistic” about the hands-free bill being signed into law before Thanksgiving.

“We made progress,” Thompson said Sunday before the vigil, “but until we have better truck guard legislation, until we are protecting vulnerable road users, until we have automated enforcement, and until our streets are designed safely we won’t be done ... .”

Emily Stein, president of the Safe Roads Alliance group, said she and other advocates have been pushing for legislation to curb distracted driving for a decade. Stein, who lost her father in 2011 to a distracted driver, said Sunday’s vigil was meant to “push legislators to look at their role in passing better traffic safety legislation.”

But a bill to address distracted driving , Stein said, is only part of the solution, particularly since 2018 saw an uptick in pedestrians and cyclists killed in crashes, the most since 1990, according to a recent report published by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

“A lot of people attribute this [increase] to distracted driving and also a lack of respect and empathy on our roads,” Stein said in a phone interview Sunday before the vigil.

Kelly Buttiglieri, public policy manager for the Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts, attended Sunday’s vigil because, she said, she sees many people in her line of work who have been seriously injured in crashes.

“A lot of times the cellphone is involved,” Buttiglieri said. “The hands-free bill will be a huge, huge benefit, I think, to drivers throughout the state.”