Dear Representatives Straus and González, Senators Keenan and Timilty, and members of the legislature:

The Massachusetts Vision Zero Coalition was formed in the fall of 2015 to advocate for the elimination of traffic injuries and deaths across Massachusetts. The Coalition is composed of nonprofits, community-based organizations, and individuals representing communities across the state. Since our Coalition’s formation in 2015, there have been 910,149 crashes in Massachusetts—2,463 of which resulted in tragic fatalities, and 15,700 of which resulted in serious injuries. This is a public health crisis that requires urgent action from the legislature.

In advance of the upcoming World Day of Remembrance, an international day honoring victims of traffic violence, we are asking you to take action and advance bills that will measurably reduce traffic fatalities across Massachusetts.

The following two bills will save lives and reduce crashes while reducing opportunities for inequitable and dangerous interactions between people and police, and we are eager to work with you to pass them into law this session:

“An Act to reduce traffic fatalities” (H.3549): an omnibus bill that would require additional mirrors, side guards, and backup cameras for certain trucks and other large vehicles; define vulnerable road users and set a safe passing distance at certain speeds; allow the default speed limit on state-owned roads...
to be lowered to 25 mph; and create a standardized crash report form for people walking and biking. Defining “vulnerable road users” is pertinent to the safety of all road users, including construction workers at job sites and tow truck drivers, in addition to those on foot and bike. This preferred House version of the bill includes important truck safety regulations. It also maintains the current law requiring a person biking to use either a rear red light or reflector, instead of adding a requirement to use both a rear red light and a rear reflector; minor bike violations like this one have been proven to lead to racial profiling and inequitable enforcement in other states.

“An Act relative to automated enforcement” (H.2426, H.2541, S.1545): would allow municipalities to opt in to installing cameras that would issue tickets for speeding, failure to stop at a red light, failure to stop at a school bus stop arm, blocking the box, and parking or driving in a dedicated bus lane. Automated enforcement would be an important addition to municipalities’ toolkits to effectively manage speeding and reduce serious crashes, while removing direct policing and traffic stops from the equation.

While we have many important policy priorities as a Coalition that would make considerable improvements to traffic safety, we have been advocating for these two particular bills for several legislative sessions. It’s time they move forward. We believe that both bills would create demonstrable increases in traffic safety by reducing speeding and creating safety improvements for vulnerable road users.

For too long, traffic deaths and severe injuries have been treated as inevitable. While often referred to as “accidents,” these tragedies are preventable if we take a proactive, preventative approach that prioritizes traffic safety and speed management as a public health issue. We ask you to advance these bills in your respective committees and work in collaboration with your colleagues to pass these bills into law this session.

This year alone, 353 more Massachusetts families have an empty seat at their table because their loved one was killed in a traffic crash. We implore you to use your legislative powers to save lives and eliminate tragic and preventable deaths on our roads.

Sincerely,

The Massachusetts Vision Zero Coalition
Adam Shutes, WalkUP Roslindale
Alex Epstein, Somerville Alliance for Safe Streets
Anna Leslie, Allston Brighton Health Collaborative
Becca Wolfson, Boston Cyclists Union
Emily Stein, Safe Roads Alliance
Galen Mook, Massachusetts Bicycle Coalition
Jarred Johnson, TransitMatters
Josh Ostroff, Transportation for Massachusetts
Julia Wallerce, Institute for Transportation and Development Policy
Nate Fillmore, Cambridge Bicycle Safety
Stacey Beuttell, WalkBoston
Stacy Thompson, LivableStreets Alliance