



## STATE OF WASHINGTON

February 7, 2024

The Honorable Andy Billig  
Senate Majority Leader  
Washington Senate  
Olympia, WA 98504

The Honorable Laurie Jinkins  
Speaker of the House  
Washington House of Representatives  
Olympia, WA 98504

The Honorable John Braun  
Senate Minority Leader  
Washington Senate  
Olympia, WA 98504

The Honorable Joe Fitzgibbon  
House Majority Leader  
Washington House of Representatives  
Olympia, WA 98504

The Honorable Drew Stokesbary  
House Minority Leader  
Washington House of Representatives  
Olympia, WA 98504

**RE: Save Lives With a 0.05 Blood Alcohol Concentration Limit, Pass SB 5002**

Dear Senators Billig and Braun, Speaker Jinkins, and Representatives Fitzgibbon and Stokesbary:

We are writing this letter to ask you to support and pass SB 5002, which will save lives by lowering the per se blood alcohol content (BAC) limit to 0.05 percent. Washington is experiencing a traffic safety crisis that is only getting worse. Washington saw 800 people killed on our roads in 2023, a 33-year high. This number could climb higher as more records are collected and analyzed.

While a small percentage of people drive impaired, they have an over-sized impact on road user deaths. The current 0.08 BAC law misleads them, allowing too many people to believe that they are safe to drive after having "just a few" drinks.

Roughly half of traffic deaths each year involve an impaired driver. Impaired driving has been the main contributing factor in these increases, accounting for 53 percent of all road deaths in 2022. A multi-branch delegation recently visited Finland and learned that only a quarter of road deaths there involve an impaired driver. Unlike Washington, their traffic fatalities continue to decline and are only a fraction of the rates we see here. European Union countries have well-established BAC limits of 0.05 or lower. Many of these countries, including Austria, France, Germany, Finland, Ireland, and Spain have per capita fatality rates that are less than half of Washington's.

Evidence clearly shows that people are too impaired to drive safely at a 0.05 BAC. At 0.05, a person experiences loss of small-muscle control (including eye focus), impaired judgment, and reduced alertness and inhibition. These changes impair coordination, ability to track moving objects, steering ability, and responsiveness to emergency driving situations. Because of these changes, the risk of crash involvement increases significantly at 0.05 percent BAC and above. The risk of a crash more than doubles by 0.07.

February 6, 2024

Page 2

The number of people killed in crashes involving an impaired driver in Washington increased 55 percent between 2019 and 2022. Perhaps the greatest tragedy is that these deaths are preventable. The U.S. has tolerated drunk driving to a much greater extent than most other countries. We have paid for this neglect with lives lost and lives shattered. We are asking the Legislature for your help to reverse these trends in 2024 and pass SB 5002.

Eighty-four percent of the Earth's population resides in countries with BAC limits of 0.05 percent or less. Even countries that consume more alcohol per capita (e.g., Australia, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Russia, Scotland, and Spain) have effectively separated drinking from driving through smart policy, education, and enforcement.


Washingtonians share the value that drinking and driving is unsafe. In a recent statewide survey of drivers across all Washington counties, 93 percent of respondents said they have not driven under the influence in the previous 12 months, and 98 percent said that driving shortly after two or more drinks was dangerous.

We know better, and we can do better. Our agencies are committed to saving lives through effective education, training, prevention, treatment, and enforcement of our laws. Fixing our misleading and outdated DUI law is a critical piece we are missing.

We hope the Legislature agrees that by establishing a scientifically valid threshold for DUI, then our family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors who could have been killed will instead be saved. However, if we do not act now, lives that could have been saved will be lost.

We urge your support of this legislation, which has proven effective across most of the planet, to protect the health and safety of everyone in Washington.

Sincerely,



Roger Millar, Secretary  
Department of Transportation



Chief John Batiste  
Washington State Patrol



Dr. Umair A. Shah, Secretary  
Department of Health



Marcus Glasper, Director  
Department of Licensing



Sue Birch, Director  
Health Care Authority



Reema Griffith, Director  
Transportation Commission



Shelly Baldwin, Director  
Traffic Safety Commission