

My name is Nancy Schulz and I'm the executive director of the Vermont Bicycle & Pedestrian Coalition, a non-profit organization that works to promote bicycling and walking and to transform Vermont into a safe and friendly place for bicyclists and pedestrians of all ages. My thanks to Chairman Lippert and to the members of the House Judiciary Committee for the invitation to come before you today to testify in support of H.501.

Last September 15 was a lovely Sunday. At 11:30 in the morning, an impaired driver in Shoreham crossed the centerline of Route 74 and struck three bicyclists head on, sending two of them to the hospital with serious injuries. The bicyclists had been riding single file on the right side of the road. They were participating with hundreds of other cyclists in the annual Tour de Farms which the Vermont Bike/Ped Coalition co-organizes each year. Less than one week later, on September 21, another impaired driver crossed a centerline and struck four bicyclists who were participating in the annual Seacoast Century in New Hampshire. Two of these cyclists were killed.

As a result of these tragic deaths and injuries, the Vermont Bike/Ped Coalition decided that it needed to take action on behalf of vulnerable roadway users to reduce the incidence of impaired driving. The problem of impaired driving is complex and while no single action will solve it, many incremental actions such as lowering the legal BAC to .05, will generate results. In the process of researching this issue, the Coalition learned that motorists who are impaired due to consumption of alcohol are treated differently under Vermont law than motorists who are impaired due to the influence of drugs, whether they be prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, or banned substances. This current disparity handicaps law enforcement, but a uniform standard of impairment, as called for in H.501, would offer a useful tool to help law enforcement officers in their efforts to keep impaired drivers off Vermont's roads.

I am not an expert on substance abuse, Vermont statutes, law enforcement, or the criminal justice system, but as a member of the Education Committee of the Vermont Highway Safety Alliance and the newly formed Impaired Driving Task Force, I have the good fortune to be able to turn to professionals who know what kinds of changes in Vermont statutes will enhance roadway safety.

Bike/ped advocates work to make bicycling and walking safer in many ways. We teach bicycle-handling skills and the rules of the road to youth and adults, we instruct drivers' ed students, we offer programs to law enforcement officers at the Police Academy and at the municipal level, and we urge all roadway users to behave legally, respectfully, and courteously toward one another. What we can't do is equip cyclists and walkers with the ability to know which cars on the road are being operated by people who can kill them due to the substances they chose to take into their bodies. It doesn't matter to the spouse of a dead bicyclist if the motorist had alcohol or drugs. What loved ones know is that they have lost their beloved needlessly.

I urge all members of the House Judiciary Committee to please do whatever you can to advance H.501 into law. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.