

ELIZABETH HOCKER, FAMILIES FOR SAFE STREETS
Testimony on Jay Alert Hit and Run Pilot Program
(for the Senate Democratic Policy Committee, 5/11/26)

Good morning. My name is Elizabeth Hocker.

I am a mother and a member of Families for Safe Streets, Greater Philadelphia.

Families for Safe Streets is a national organization with local chapters across the country made up of people who have been injured in a traffic crash, or, like me, have lost a loved one in a crash. We advocate for street design and policies that protect all road users.

I want to thank you -- Senator Miller, Senator Williams, and Representative Cephas -- for holding this Senate Democratic Policy Committee hearing that recognizes that something must be done to address hit-and-run crashes in our communities.

Each year in Pennsylvania, many people are killed or seriously injured in hit-and-run crashes. In 2024 alone, there were 72 hit-and-run crashes in Pennsylvania. My son was one of those 72 lives lost.

The pain of living without him is relentless, and it has affected not just our family, but his classmates and our larger community. All of our lives are profoundly altered.

My son, Damien, was only 17 years old when he was violently killed in a hit-and-run while walking home from the gym on April 16, 2024. He had always been a cautious child, and he was taking what we had determined to be the safest route home. Damien was less than three blocks from his father's house when he was struck while crossing the street.

Damien was my only child. We were extremely close, sharing a similar sense of humor and overlapping interests. He was an only grandchild who eagerly helped his grandparents when there was an opportunity. Damien was a leader amongst his friends and encouraged them to pursue their interests and take good care of themselves. He worked at a fast food restaurant and spent as much time as he could with his girlfriend. Damien aspired to be a personal trainer, having found exercise to be a great outlet for the stress and pressure of teenage life.

When my son, Damien, was killed, the driver touched their breaks for a brief moment but never stopped, even though there was severe damage to the front driver's side of the vehicle. The driver was identified later the same day, was ultimately convicted of a hit-and-run felony, and is currently serving their sentence.

In most hit and run cases, however, in addition to the unspeakable suffering that those who have lost a loved one must endure, they must also live with the fact that, tragically, the drivers in hit-and-run crashes are never identified. The victims' loved ones are deprived of answers and never have any sense of justice being served. There is also a financial burden for families who do not have access to a driver's insurance information or the ability to take the driver to civil court. Jay Alert is designed to help police quickly

identify hit-and-run drivers who try to avoid accountability by having the damage the crash caused to their vehicles removed by auto body shops, destroying any obvious evidence and any hope of justice ever being served.

Several states already have alert systems designed to apprehend hit-and-run drivers. Colorado's Medina Alert is reported to be highly effective often identifying drivers within a few days of an alert being activated. With data that shows alert systems to be effective we should not accept that so many hit-and-run drivers are never found and continue to drive in our neighborhoods.

Hit-and-run crashes have long been a problem in Pennsylvania. Identifying the need to deter intoxicated drivers from leaving the scene of a crash, Kevin's Law was enacted in 2014. Kevin's Law increased the mandatory minimum sentence for drivers convicted of hit-and-run to 3 years for fatal crashes, the same minimum as homicide by vehicle while intoxicated.

While Kevin's Law may serve as a deterrent for some to leaving the scene of a crash, it is not as effective as it would be if a larger percentage of hit-and-run drivers were being identified. Sadly, drivers, who are aware that many hit-and-runs go unsolved, decide to flee the scene, counting on never being caught. This is why we need Jay Alert to quickly apprehend drivers involved in hit-and-runs and hold them accountable for their actions..

Vulnerable road users (such as pedestrians and bicyclists) are disproportionately the victims of deadly hit-and-run crashes. A quarter of deadly pedestrian crashes are hit-and-run crashes. According to the most recent data available, in 2023, more than 70% of people killed in hit-and-runs were pedestrians and bicyclists. In contrast, pedestrians and bicyclists made up approximately 20% of all traffic fatalities in 2023.

Walking is a basic freedom - one that enables greater access to our communities. All people should be able to safely walk in their neighborhoods, but my son never made it home.

We all want our children to be safe when walking to and from school, their friends' houses, and sports games. We all want to cross the street to the supermarket, or bike to work, without fearing for our lives. These tragic losses impact all of our families and ultimately tear the fabric of our communities. When crashes do happen, we all deserve justice for our loved ones and community members.

Ideally, across the Commonwealth, we are aiming to have zero deaths and serious injuries from vehicle crashes. Many people are working hard to achieve that goal. However, it will take many years before we have no more serious crashes. In the meantime, there are families and friends in our communities, who are not only grieving the loss of their loved ones, but are also suffering without answers because hit and run drivers are not being held accountable.

There is no acceptable number of unsolved hit-and-runs. We know that hit-and-run alert systems are effective solutions. If we care about justice for the victims of hit-and-run crashes and their loved ones, we must establish such a system in Pennsylvania. Jay Alert will help us solve and deter hit-and-run crashes, making our communities safer for all people.