

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SAFE ROADS NOW CALLS FOR COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTION TO IMPROVE ROAD SAFETY

-- Focus on Ability, Not Age --

BOSTON, MA – Today, the **Safe Roads Now** coalition – a broad group of more than a dozen elder advocates, academics, law enforcement, medical professionals and others – continued its call for a comprehensive solution to improve road safety that focuses on ability, not age. Elizabeth Dugan, Ph.D., associate professor at UMASS Boston and author of *The Driving Dilemma: The Complete Resource Guide for Older Drivers and Their Families*, testified on behalf of **Safe Roads Now** during a hearing of the Joint Committee on Transportation at the State House in Boston.

Dugan urged the committee “to focus on the shared goal of improved road safety and choose evidence-based policies to craft a comprehensive solution.” She added, “Please do not be distracted by an orchestrated media frenzy. Please do not move forward with a proposal that will have no impact on making our roads safer.

“A comprehensive solution to road safety,” Dugan said, “will require reform in medical reporting, licensing procedures, and evaluations of our reforms to make sure we are obtaining gains in safety.”

Dugan explained that states rely on two policies to keep medically, impaired, unsafe drivers off the road: 1) medical reporting procedures, and 2) licensing policies.

Safe Roads Now believes an effective medical reporting system is a strong first step to reduce crashes and increase road safety. The group supports House Bill No. 2241, *An Act Relative to Impaired Drivers*, which was favorably released last week from the Public Safety Committee. Dugan cited a recent study about the medical reporting system in Missouri. It found that once reported, medically impaired drivers generally ceased to be active drivers, with 96.5% retiring from active driving during the process. “The percentage of crashes fell steeply after Missouri’s medical reporting law was enacted,” she said.

“Evidence regarding the impact of licensing procedures on road safety is less clear,” Dugan said. “States are using a variety of approaches including: increased testing requirements, accelerated renewal cycles, in-person renewals, and medical certification of fitness to drive.”

According to a research article published in JAMA, the Journal of the American Medical Association, requiring in-person renewals is the only policy to result in a reduction of driver fatalities. “A comprehensive solution to road safety should include in-person renewal requirements,” Dugan urged. “There is no evidence to suggest that mandatory age-based road tests of 85-year-old drivers will reduce fatalities.”

Due to gains in human longevity and the aging of the Boomer generation, the number of older drivers, age 65 and over, is increasing. Dugan said, “Looking forward, the number of older drivers is expected to double in the next 25 years. Our current regulatory approach needs reform to maximize road safety in an aging society.”

Safe Roads Now recently put forward 14-points to improve driver licensing standards, including:

1. Conduct in-person driver license renewals, throughout a driver’s lifespan.
2. Implement a new screening test, currently used in California, that addresses visual contrast sensitivity, visual acuity, periphery vision, divided attention, and processing speed.
3. Introduce a three-tiered driver license renewal system, also currently used in California, whereby drivers would need to take additional testing should they fail the initial off-road testing components; ultimately they may need to take a road test.
4. Implement a trigger system in which motorists who have a certain number of accidents over a specified time period would be required to take an in-person exam.

The members of **Safe Roads Now** include: AAA Southern New England; AARP Massachusetts; Alzheimer's Association Massachusetts/New Hampshire Chapter; Massachusetts Association of Councils on Aging and Senior Center Directors; Massachusetts Association of Older Americans; Massachusetts Medical Society; Massachusetts Silver Legislature; Senior Mobility Initiative on Cape Cod; Jon Bailey, TRIAD Officer, Waltham Police; Juergen Bludau, MD; Elizabeth Dugan, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Gerontology, University of Massachusetts Boston; Lissa Robins Kapust, LICSW, Program Coordinator, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center Drive Wise Program; Margaret O'Connor, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Neurology, Harvard Medical School; Nina M. Silverstein, Ph.D., Professor of Gerontology, University of Massachusetts Boston; and, Robert Stern, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Neurology, Boston University School of Medicine.

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