



To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Transportation

From: Rep. Jodi Emerson

Re: Support of AB 151

Dear Mr. Chairman and members of the committee,

On November 3rd, many elected officials were busy working. It was the weekend before the election and it was time to get out the vote.

For Girl Scout Troop #3055, they were busy cleaning up a highway under Wisconsin's Adopt-a-highway program. Children and adults from Halmstad and Southview Elementary in Chippewa Falls donned bright green yellow safety vests and went to work doing what Girl Scouts do, trying to make their corner of the world a better place.

However, 3 girls and one adult would never go home that day. Jayna Kelley, Autumn Helegeson, Hayley Hickle and Hayley's mother Sara Jo Schneider were hit by a vehicle and killed that day. Another member of their troop, Maddie Zwiefelhofer, was hit and critically injured. She spent weeks in the hospital before she was able to return home.

When I heard about this accident, it hit me in the gut. Not only because I knew someone who was on scene but because I had spent years as a Girl Scout Troop leader and it never crossed my mind that helping our community in this way could have such deadly consequences.

AB 151 expands the definition of highway maintenance or construction area to include those who are cleaning up trash and the areas adjacent to the road. This bill is a good fix to an existing loophole.

Every year, volunteers from businesses, families, clubs, sports teams, church groups, and yes, even scout troops make sure that over 11,800 miles of Wisconsin's highways are kept clean for all of us to enjoy. They work hard for Wisconsin but Wisconsin has not done all we can to make it safe for them to do this community service.

We protect road construction workers, maintenance workers, law enforcement, first responders and tow truck drivers with our laws. Let's make sure that we pass AB 151 so that we can better protect volunteers like Jayna, Autumn, Hayley, Sara Jo and numerous others who put themselves in danger to keep Wisconsin's roads clean and beautiful.

Thank you for hearing this bill and I respectfully ask for your support of AB 151.

April 23, 2019

Assembly Committee on Transportation
Wisconsin State Capitol
2 East Main Street
Madison, WI 53702



Dear Transportation Committee Member:

My name is Brian Kelley and I am in support of Assembly Bill 151 to provide stricter penalties for traffic violations in work zones where adopt-a-highway volunteers are present. I have experience with this matter that I feel is relevant to your discussions and I would like to thank Chair Kulp and his staff for informing me of the opportunity to speak today. My job is that of Highway Commissioner in Chippewa County, where I have been employed for almost 6 years. As part of our duties, my staff and I administer Chippewa County's adopt-a-highway program.

My wife, Robin, is a troop leader for Halmstad Elementary Girl Scout Troop #3055. She and I came up with the idea for the troop to adopt a highway near their school as a community service project. We chose County Highway P in the Village of Lake Hallie because it is very flat and has excellent site vision distances. It is a fairly-busy road, but there are wide paved shoulders, with gravel shoulders beyond that. The speed limits are 35 to 45 MPH throughout this 2-mile stretch. My family regularly walked, jogged, and biked on this stretch of roadway. I met with the girls and their parents about a week before the litter cleanup work to discuss the logistics and review all of the safety protocols. The girls were all very excited about it.

On the morning of November 3rd, my 9-year old daughter, Jayna, and I headed out to set up all four of the signs for the work zone after breakfast. We placed 2 extra signs half-way because of a busy intersection there. Then we went back to our house to meet the rest of the group. I reviewed the safety protocols again such as:

- No one goes on the road or paved shoulder. We stay in the grass or gravel shoulder.
- We go towards traffic at all times so we can see cars coming our way.
- No one crosses the road unless chaperones are with. That is only 2 times that we will cross as a group.

We headed out to the work zone and got to work. Everything was going smoothly and we were about 100 yards from the end of the job. All of the volunteers were doing exactly as we discussed and they were looking forward to going back to our house for hot cocoa and cookies soon.

Many lives were forever changed in an instant at this point. A 21-year old uninsured driver with a revoked license and his friend had decided to go to Wal-Mart and buy some aerosol dusting chemicals to inhale. They started huffing on their 4-mile drive home as they drove towards our work zone. The driver is said to have blacked out just long enough to cross the entire roadway into the

opposite ditch, run over 5 people, and steer back onto the roadway without slowing down. He hid the truck in his garage, waited until the huffing chemicals were out of his system, and then turned himself in. Our daughter Jayna (9), along with her fellow troop members Autumn Helgeson (10), Haylee Hickle (10), and Haylee's mother Sara Jo Schneider (32) were killed. Madalyn Zwiefelhofer, a fifth grade sibling of a troop member was badly injured and continues her recovery today. Instead of doing the things we loved to do with our daughters, our three families now get to build memorials and attend court hearings. My family has founded the Jayna Kelley Memorial Foundation so that Jayna can help others for a very long time.

I remember thinking after the crash that it had to be a distracted driver or impaired driver as this has always been my biggest fear regarding the safety of my family and employees. I constantly tell my employees that they need to be on the lookout for these things. I've always hovered over my family when we're on a bike ride or walking on a city street. Distracted, impaired, and speeding drivers are passing us on the street and going through our work zones constantly. Assembly Bill 151 is a step in the right direction for protecting these volunteers. Wisconsin also needs to be proactive in addressing the roots of what is happening in our state. We can do more to utilize technology to eliminate cell phone use while driving vehicles. We can do more to educate young drivers on the dangers of distracted and impaired driving. We can do more to address methamphetamine and opioid abuse in our communities. We can do more to enforce the laws that exist, such as illegal use of cell phones in work zones. I never want to see another person hurt or killed doing something as selfless as picking up litter in the roadway ditches and I fully support this measure to keep these people a little bit safer.

Thank you for this opportunity,

Brian Kelley

Brian Kelley
(father of Jayna Kelley)



**Assembly Committee on Transportation
Testimony on Assembly Bill 161
April 23rd 2019**

Chairman Kulp and members of the committee,

I am writing in support of AB 151. As a mother of a 10 year old killed while we were participating in a highway clean-up project, I have seen firsthand the devastation of families and a community, when a service turns into tragedy.

I feel strongly that this bill would bring more awareness to drivers passing through service area just as drivers have awareness for construction zones. As a community member who has participated in several highway clean-up projects, I feel strongly that service participants should be afforded the awareness and protection that will result from this bill.

Please vote yes to AB 151 to add protection for our community service members. Perhaps another family will be spared the unimaginable grief, pain and loss that our Chippewa Falls Community has endured.

Thank you,

Kimberley Helgeson
13281 35th Ave
Chippewa Falls, WI 54729