

The Pedestrians Who Never Saw Their Tomorrows

Survivor Leads Northern Virginia Families for Safe Streets during International World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE GAZETTE

Twenty-four chalked body outlines, each representing a fatality in a road traffic crash last year in Northern Virginia, greeted family members who lost a loved one to road violence, crash survivors, concerned citizens, and members of Northern Virginia Families for Safe Streets (NoVA FSS) as they walked into Gateway Park in Arlington on Nov. 16. The solemn procession set the tone for the World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims event, held annually on the third Sunday of November.

"Each tragedy, each crash, each fatality, is a story of a family member who was lost, or, in other cases, serious injuries," said Michael Doyle, executive director and founder of NoVA FSS. "All of these situations could be avoided and that's what we're trying to do to do today, is to raise awareness."

Doyle opened the two-phase event by detailing the regional crisis, noting there were 133 serious injuries and 24 fatalities last year. He added that year-to-date, there have been 13 fatalities.

Doyle introduced the first speaker, "a brave lady who is a crash survivor, Helen Harris."

Harris gave a powerful and deeply personal speech as a survivor of traffic violence. Harris recounted the tragic event seven years ago, when a truck made a left turn and struck her as she crossed the street with her four-month-old daughter in a stroller at the intersection of Fort Myer Drive and Langston Blvd — the very location of the remembrance event.

Harris suffered catastrophic injuries, including an above-the-knee amputation. Her infant daughter was uninjured because Harris pushed her toward safety as the truck bore down on her.

Harris described the immense physical and emotional challenges of adapting to life after her injury, but recognized her survival as a form of luck: "I am one of the lucky ones. Unfortunately, there are those who did not make it through to share their stories themselves." She urged the community to support data-driven solutions, highlighting the passage of SB 1416, which holds drivers more accountable for injuring vulnerable road users.

Arlington County Board Chair

Takis Karantonis said the ceremony was a "symbolic funeral" for lives lost in situations that were, above all, "avoidable."

"Avoidable is the critical word that we need to work to avoid an accident. Avoidable accident is a kind of a contradiction in terms. Okay, I am a big believer that accidents are actually not accidents, as long as they are avoidable," Karantonis said.

Karantonis continued that the county's Vision Zero commitment centers on rebuilding the city to make the "avoidable avoided by design" as he spoke about roadway safety and urban planning.

The policy progress Karantonis referenced was detailed by Sen. Adam Ebbin (D-39), who highlighted the successful passage of SB 1417, the vulnerable road users bill, which aims to implement protective measures such as encouraging local governments to create safer infrastructure.

Del. Patrick Hope described new technology like Intelligent Speed Assistance that Virginia became the first state in the country to adopt for repeat reckless offenders. He described it as a device that can be installed in cars that physically prevents the driver from exceeding the posted speed limit by more than five or seven miles per hour. "And those are for reckless drivers, repeat offenders that we can target to make sure that these tragedies don't happen again," Hope said.

Chief Tarrick McGuire of the Alexandria Police Department committed to putting action behind his department's words. "We want people to be safe," McGuire said, emphasizing the need for regional collaboration.

The event concluded with a call to action from Ben Allard, president of the Arlington FSS Board, who warned, "The future victims of traffic violence are the people who are still with us today, and so every action that we don't take is imperiling the lives of people who would be victims in the future." He urged specific advocacy actions, including expanded local authority to implement speed safety cameras. "The state shouldn't stop us," he said. Allard also advocated for car-free zones.

Some members of the demonstrators met up with members of other DMV Families for Safe Streets Chapters for a WDoR rally at the Lincoln Memorial at noon.

NoVA FSS urges the community to advocate to protect pedestri-



Michael Doyle, executive director and founder of Northern Virginia Families for Safe Streets hosts the 2025 World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims in Arlington on Nov. 16.



Crash survivor Helen Harris of Arlington is introduced by Michael Doyle, founder of Northern Virginia Families for Safe Streets, at the 2025 World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims in Arlington on Nov. 16.



Sen. Adam Ebbin (D-39) highlights the successful passage of SB 1417, the vulnerable road users bill.



Chief Tarrick McGuire of the Alexandria Police Department: "We want people to be safe."



Del. Patrick Hope (D-1) describes the Intelligent Speed Assistance, device that can be installed in cars so that physically you will not be able to exceed the posted speed limit by more than five or seven MPH.

PHOTOS SOURCE:
VIDEO BY SAN WINTER



Ben Allard, president of the Arlington Families for Safe Streets: "The state shouldn't stop us," Allard says, referencing speed cameras.



Arlington County Board Chair Takis Karantonis: "Accidents are actually not accidents, as long as they are avoidable."

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