

testimony to Criminal Justice Commission re: Chief State's Attorney

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Dear Members of the Criminal Justice Commission,

My name is Aaron Goode and I live at 45 William Street in New Haven, Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I'm sure you will be hearing testimony from the public about many pressing, unresolved issues in our criminal justice system - but let me raise a very serious issue that you will probably hear little about.

Connecticut needs a new Chief State's Attorney who will take seriously the epidemic of traffic violence that is currently occurring in Connecticut (and nationwide), endangering not only lives but also the quality of life in our communities. In New Haven alone, there have been seven pedestrians killed on city streets since the beginning of 2019. Last year (2018) Connecticut experienced an increase in pedestrian fatalities of an astonishing 53% over the previous year, the fourth highest percentage increase of all states for that time period. In Hartford the number of pedestrian fatalities was equivalent to the number of gun homicides.

Public health officials and the National Transportation Safety Board have deemed the skyrocketing of pedestrian fatalities a national crisis. Between 2009 and 2016 pedestrian deaths increased by 46 percent nationally, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Pedestrian deaths now comprise 16 percent of the total traffic deaths in the U.S., up from 11 percent in 2011. Nearly 6000 American pedestrians lost their lives last year, more than any other year since 1990. Fatalities of bicyclists are also on the rise -- an issue of particular salience to New Haven, which has the highest percentage of bicycle commuters in New England. The most recent data from the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA) shows 840 bicycle fatalities in 2016. The GHSA notes that the number has steadily increased by an average of 55 bicyclist fatalities every year since 2011. This national crisis of senseless, preventable deaths is one that state and local governments, including prosecutors, have been too slow to address.

The epidemic of pedestrian and bicycle deaths is multi-causal. Studies have shown that the increasing shift in vehicle sales from smaller to larger, heavier vehicles, and the increasing prevalence of distracted driving, are major factors, but it is critical to understand that both of these causes are seriously, and unacceptably, compounded by inadequate enforcement of traffic laws. Let me cite a few egregious recent examples where lax enforcement is creating a permissive climate for distracted driving and traffic violence: in 2017, student