

SPEECH FOR TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE ON THE
SENATE SIDE, AMENDED SB829 NOT JUST FOR THE SOUTHEAST
SIDE BUT ALL THE WAY DOWN THE LINE.

Mr. Chair, Members of The Committee thank you for inviting me here today to testify. My name is Darla Sturdy, I'm the General Manager of a Hot Tub Company that has 5 stores. I have worked there for 7 years.

I'm here as a mother, I'm going to tell you about my son. I'm going to show you a snapshot of Tri-Met's safety record with facts, a Pie Chart that I've had to gather from 3 different sources to prove why they need an independent safety study. I'm also here to explain why Tri-Met needs to install safety gates at Civic Drive and the MAX Line.

Like many of you, I have a family that I deeply care about and means more to me than anything else. Maybe you or someone you know has lost someone close such as a family member. I lost my son. God blesses you with children, for you to take care of, to love them, to teach them, but not to outlive them. My son had so many great qualities, though I will touch on just a few. He started baseball at the age of five and played nine years. He began tae-kwon-do at the age of eight. At the age of nine he went to the Junior Olympics and placed 4th in the nation. He started football in the 5th grade and played for six years. In middle school he played basketball, did track

and also wrestled, placing 1st in many tournaments. Student body president his eighth grade year to around 750 students, and two years of drama in high school. During his last year of life he and his sister became the first brother and sister of Gresham High School to ever make state at the same time in drama. He also placed fourth for Mr. Gresham at his high school his sophomore year. He was involved in his church's youth group every Wednesday night and with a high school Christian group called Soul Food. My son's name is Aaron Wagner Sturdy. He would be the first one to tell you to "Do for others before yourself". My son was headed home on his dad's bike after spending the day talking to a youth group and witnessing to a friend about God and church camp when he was taken from me.

I live in Gresham, the first place they started the MAX line. When they built the MAX line it was all fields there. They were setting it up so that they could take people from one side of town to another and when they set it up they set up gates for the cars but not for the pedestrians. We've now built around the MAX line. City hall, schools, mall, apartments, etc. In the more recently constructed parts of the MAX line pedestrian gates have already been installed. However, on the Eastside, where MAX began in the mid 1980's, pedestrian safety has gone ignored. In your packets, you will find a letter from the director of Center for Advanced Learning (CAL) who

wishes he could be here today but has prior commitments. His letter expresses that we are “on borrowed time of having a fatality at this location,” referencing the CAL High School MAX crossing. Following Director Lesh’s letter, there are photos of this hazardous MAX pedestrian crossing accompanied by citizen letters that further exemplify the concern over the Eastside’s lack of pedestrian safety at MAX pedestrian crossings.

Also in your packet is a letter from Mayor of Gresham, Shane T. Bemis. His letter states “How your legislative actions can enhance the livability of our community by ensuring that the public transportation system does not pose a threat to pedestrian traffic”. Since 2002 until now, 3 safety gates have been installed along the Westside MAX pedestrian crossings in 3 stations. You can find photos of these gates in your packet. In my research, there has been only 1 single collision on the Westside since the installation of those gates. Meanwhile, the Eastside continues to have many collisions causing loss of limbs and life EASTSIDE had 18 collisions compared to the WESTSIDE had 1.

I have amended Senate Bill 829 to addresses one Eastside location in front of the Center for Advanced Learning, where 430 advanced East County high school students attend. This location is also the connecting **LINK and the only crossing** between Gresham Station, a large multi-store

shopping development, and Gresham Station North, made up of residential buildings and businesses such as a state of the art Adventist Health Center and surgery center, and LA fitness athletic club. It was recently reported in this area that Gresham Station North is scheduled to continue developing with a cinema theatre and additional parking for Gresham Station. The MAX pedestrian crossing at the Civic Drive and MAX line is a safety concern for the merchants and residents in this area. In your packet, you will find the signatures of these merchants on a petition imploring that you pass this bill. It is the only crossing between the multi store shopping center and the residential buildings and businesses.

I realize that placing safety gates at every MAX pedestrian crossing is a task that must consider many factors determined by experts. This is why I have amended Senate Bill 829, which calls for a study by a group of independent safety experts to make recommendations to the respective districts regarding the pedestrian MAX crossings in their areas. First I've had to gather information from 3 different sources, none of which were inclusive of all information. Secondly when my Representative Linda Flores tried to get the information from Tri-Met , they were told go see ODOT. ODOT was contacted and they said GO SEE TRI-MET. NOBODY WANTED TO BE SPECIFIC. So I've assembled what I believe are

accurate numbers that reflect the true conditions and safety records. That's partly why I want an independent expert to look at their records and make the total picture available to you. I've included a Pie Chart to show you some **STAGGERING** numbers. I'm **APPALLED** that in the year my son was killed in 2003 MAX Train hit 11 other people, 10 of them were on the East County side. And here we are in 2007 and I'm still trying to make it safe. **DID YOU KNOW, THAT SINCE 1997, 10 SHORT YEARS, THERE HAVE BEEN 53 PEDESTRIANS HIT BY THE MAX TRAIN.**

APPROXIMATELY 60% IN EAST COUNTY. Furthermore in Tri-Met's manual it states they train their drivers to avoid accidents. However, experts tell me they do not follow good sound safety training. In fact things that are avoidable are judged unavoidable because of their weak approach to safety.

I'm here as a parent who doesn't want another parent or family member to go through what we have been through. Tri-Met continues to build more MAX lines but yet we haven't gone back to make it safe where MAX began in Gresham. So who is going to make it safe for the people? Since my son's death, I have kept track by listening and being told of deaths and maimed people on the Eastside. If pedestrian safety were top priority on the Eastside, maybe some of these lives could have been saved. I cannot bring my son back from heaven but I can help make it safe for you and your family.

Remember I will never again get to tell my son I love him or hold him each night when I come home.

IN CONCLUSION I'm here as a Mom, I've told you about my son, I've gathered the facts for you that you have not heard or seen before today. The **FACTS ARE THE FACTS, 18 TO 1.** 18 collisions on the east side compared to 1 on the west side since 2002. I've shown you the need to have a group of independent safety experts to review the at-grade crossings and make findings and recommendations about the safety of the at-grade crossings. I've told you also why there was an urgent need to put safety gates at Civic Drive and the MAX Line.

Please make sure this passes the committee to go on to be voted in the senate so that it can become a law and save lives Senate Bill 829 Aaron's Bridge to Safety. May God be with all of you as you make this decision? My son had a saying, "Dream big, don't let the little things get in your way." To me that means, "It's okay Mom, you can't save me, but you can save someone else".

Aaron's Bridge to Safety that's what it's all about making it safe for your children, your grandchildren, and really anyone you know.

IT'S YOUR DECISION—"WHAT IS A LIFE WORTH?"