

Kayla Merchant

Transportation and Public Safety Committee, Chair: Doug Green

Good afternoon. My name is Kayla Merchant and I am a long time resident of the South Side of Columbus. I've served as a civic association president and secretary, and I've served as an area commissioner for Columbus District 2. In my time in serving my community, I have repeatedly heard concerns of residents with regard to lowering speed limits in our neighborhoods when it's in the best interest of everyone's safety. I've heard the frustration of parents with young children who feel they cannot let them play in their front yard for fear of what might happen if a reckless driver speeds by at the wrong moment, yet they have few options for recourse.

This summer, I sat on the front porch of my new home in Southern Orchards with some of the long time residents on my block. Their children played in my sprinkler and we chatted about the changes the neighborhood has seen over the years. The kids ran back and forth across the street from my house to their own, grabbing toys, juice, and snacks to bring back to the other little ones. One of the youngest, around three years old and under his older sister's care, ran over to the sidewalk and nearly toppled into the street - presently prescribed a 25 miles per hour speed limit. At that very moment, a car was driving northbound at no less than 40 miles per hour and slammed on the brakes causing the car to skid, nearly hitting the children in the process.

That day thankfully ended with the children continuing to play in the sprinkler until the street lights came on and it was their bedtime. Their mother tucked them into bed that night and prepared lunch for them for the following day just as she always had, but that night it was all a bit sweeter knowing how close she came to instead being at Nationwide Children's Hospital that night with them, or worse. Residents should have the agency to petition to have their residential speed limits lowered so that they have the ability to feel safe in their communities and so that children, the elderly, and the differently abled are able to move freely throughout their communities. We can't make everyone follow the law, but we can ensure that we are providing our neighbors with tools that help to create positive change that would be beneficial for everyone.

In closing, it's my sincere hope that this will receive the bipartisan support it needs to come to fruition. I'd like to thank Representative Boggs and Representative Leland for bringing this bill to the table and for the other community organizers, activists, and partners who have worked on this. Thank you for your time.