

Brooklyn Residents Demand Answers for Pedestrian Deaths

BY: Brandon Sapienza

“When will this all end?” That was the question State Senator Andrew Gounardes posed to the city of New York on Feb. 28 at a press conference outside P.S. 185 in Bay Ridge. Gounardes called the press conference following the recent string of pedestrian deaths in New York City, many of which included young children on their way to school.

Gounardes throughout the press conference in which he was flanked by friends and families of those whose lives were taken in the streets by cars and trucks in recent weeks, showed his anger at recent changes New York City has made at combatting deaths in the streets.

“Vision Zero is not enough. Speed cameras are not enough,” Gounardes said. “This keeps happening because of a culture of reckless driving.”

Gounardes is the sponsor of a bill now in the State Senate in Albany that would require all intersections in New York City to be designated as crosswalks even if some of them may not have the appropriate indicatory markers. In this bill is also a rating system that would classify vehicles on the basis of how likely it is that a particular vehicle would cause fatal harm to pedestrians and fellow motorists. The bill also includes provisions that would make it easier for lawyers to hit clean record drivers with more serious charges.



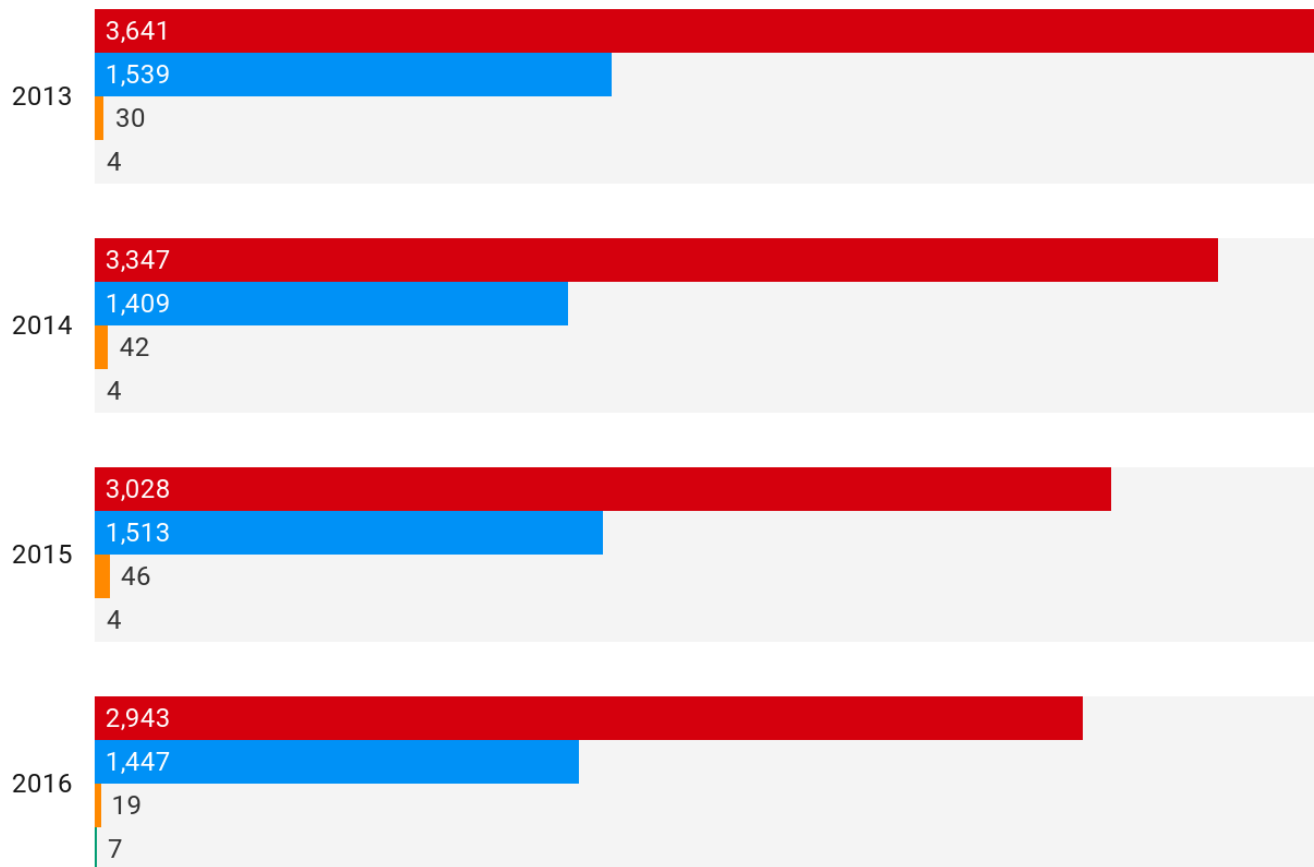
Along with the demands Gounardes was making to his constituents in Albany and in City Hall, the anger was met with sadness from the families of the victims. Jose Contla’s sister, Arleen Soto, spoke and informed the large gathering about the life her brother led just prior to his death.

“He found his passion. He hoped someday to become a lawyer,” Soto said. Jose was a high school dropout but then made the decision to return to school at Kingsborough Community College with the hopes of attending John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

Pedestrian and Cyclist Injuries and Fatalities (2013-2016)

While pedestrian injuries and fatalities have significantly decreased in a short time span, the total amount of injuries puts increased pressure on the City of New York's Vision Zero initiative.

■ Pedestrian Injuries ■ Cyclist Injuries ■ Pedestrian Fatalities ■ Cyclist Fatalities



Source: *Diamond Injury Law*

Chart: Brandon Sapienza • Created with Datawrapper

Contla was killed early in the morning on Sunday, Feb. 23 on 86th Street and 19th Avenue in Bensonhurst. The impact sent the 26-year-old 50 feet away from the scene of the accident and the driver sped off.

Other recent notable deaths include a 7-year-old boy and a 10-year-old girl in East New York, both deaths just taking place within a few days of each other in late February.

Mona Nakhleh resides in an area in Bay Ridge surrounded by numerous dangerous intersections.

“I’m scared sometimes to walk around because I know sometimes drivers can be careless,” she said. “Plus there’s always a lot of traffic, especially here on 86th Street so I know that drivers get impatient and make really bad decisions sometimes.”

The 68th Precinct, responsible for the areas of South Brooklyn including Bay Ridge have been stepping up in recent weeks in light of more pedestrian accidents. More recently, Auxiliary officers were deployed to assist pedestrians crossing one of the more busy intersections in Bay Ridge.

Patrol cars have also been more frequently sighted around dangerous intersections including the one in which State Senator Gounardes held his press conference.

“I got pulled over for failing to yield,” explained David Carrington. “Honestly it’s hard to see around certain sections of the neighborhood at night because there are no lights on some streets. They’re cracking down on drivers and it’s becoming more annoying to be a driver in New York City.”



Assemblyman Felix Ortiz has his own bill in the works that would require additional safety instruction to pre-licensing courses that have to do with pedestrian and cyclist safety.

In an interview with the Brooklyn Reporter, Ortiz said, “I would encourage my colleagues and the governor to step up to the plate. We need to take ownership of our streets.”

“Of course I want the streets to be safer,” Carrington said. “But New York is a driving type of city, especially in certain areas where the subway isn’t really an option. I just hope everyone remembers that.”

Just a few days after Carrington’s statement, another pedestrian was killed in an accident in Bay Ridge on March 5, while walking his dog near the Verrazano Bridge on ramp. The driver, a 19-year-old man remained on the scene and an investigation is still pending.