



February 8, 2023

Dear Honorable Representatives of the House Transportation Committee,

My name is Pamela Biddle, and I am a Georgia resident of Harris County. I'm writing to share my serious concern for roadway safety and the financial burden that will be imposed on Georgia residents due to a recently proposed amendment named **HB 189**. This bill, if passed and enacted would allow a permanent weight and load increase on single axel up to 23,000 pounds and tandem axles up to 46,000 pounds, which would be the heaviest allowance in the entire nation allowed on any State's highways without an overweight permit. This cannot be allowed to pass.

I tragically write to you as someone who is intimately aware of the public dangers that a poorly regulated commercial truck industry can cause to families. My first-born son Aaron Lee, a young nursing student, and my former husband Brian Lee, a Navy veteran, were killed in a large truck crash. A negligent truck driver operating a poorly maintained car hauler had caught on fire and was blocking their lane. They were stopped in traffic and another speeding distracted truck driver hit them at 76 mph without applying his brakes. Passing **HB 189** to allow heavier overweight trucks without a permit on our rural highways will drastically increase the probability more Georgians will experience the devastation caused by large truck crashes as my family has.

My son Aaron was on the verge of making important contributions to our world. I have no doubt if he were alive today, he would have been one of those dedicated frontline responders working long and difficult hours in a hospital and caring for ill and injured patients giving them comfort, hope and support with his upbeat personality, compassionate nature, and his incredible talents. Passing **HB 189 will rob Georgia** of so much more immeasurable human potential like my son had in exchange for providing special interest exemptions that paid lobbyists, shippers and receivers are asking for. This is an unacceptable trade off and must be forcefully opposed.

I also write to you as a Board Member of the Truck Safety Coalition (TSC), a partnership between Parents Against Tired Truckers (P.A.T.T.) and Citizens for Reliable and Safe Highways (CRASH). These truck safety organizations are made up of volunteers comprised of families of large truck crash victims and injured survivors, including families of truck drivers, here in Georgia and across the country.

**HB 189** would provide a 12.5% variance of total truck and load weight increasing the federally mandated maximum weight limit of 80,000 pounds on interstate roads to 90,000 pounds on Georgia highways, in all rural and urban areas. It would repeal all conflicting laws in Georgia Code and remove the limited commodity restrictions allowed only for forestry, poultry and

concrete to be extended to other industries by amending Code Section 32-6-26 of the Official Code of Georgia.

Passing HB 189 would result in Georgia having the highest allowances for weight per single axle and the highest per tandem axle in the nation without a permit. **No other State House has put their residents' lives at risk to this degree.** HB189 is an unnecessary and reckless Bill that completely disregards our citizen's public health and safety. There is no question that heavier trucks are more dangerous and will result in more severe crashes. Countless studies have repeatedly shown that adding more weight to a truck makes it more dangerous and deadly to passenger vehicles. For example, in 2016, the U.S. Department of Transportation **reported higher crash rates, between 47%-400%**, for trucks weighing over 80,000 pounds.<sup>1</sup> **In a truck crash with a passenger vehicle, it will come as no surprise that 97% of the fatalities were car occupants** according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety ([IIHS](#)). This is due to the substantial difference in the size and weight of large trucks compared to a 4,000-pound passenger vehicle. Despite safety features such as airbags, crumple zones, seat belts, and driver-assist technologies that are in passenger vehicles today, these features cannot completely preclude injury or prevent the death of passenger vehicle occupants during an impact with a semi-truck that is 24 times heavier.

**Not one iota of research demonstrates that heavier trucks leads to safer roadways.** Over 230 Georgians lost their lives in large trucks in 2020 (the most recent year for which data is available), representing a 53% increase since 2012.<sup>2</sup> Adding weight to trucks increases their velocity and ability to cause more severe, destructive crashes.<sup>3</sup> It also affects stopping distance. Current Federal standards require passenger cars to stop in 215 feet, but large tractor-trailers weighing just 80,000 pounds can take up to 355 feet to come to a stop on dry pavement -- the entire length of a football field. A 100,000-pound truck needs 25% more stopping distance than an 80,000-pound truck. Furthermore, excessively heavy trucks are 18% more likely to have brake violations due to the increase in wear and tear.<sup>4</sup> This is incredibly problematic as trucks with ANY out of service violation are a stunning 362% more likely to be involved a crash.<sup>5</sup> Distributing the weight across multiple axles doesn't change these statistics.

Specific to forest products commercial truck crashes, increases persist across the board. Consider the following:

- Log truck crashes in Georgia rose from 106 to 142 in 2020 (the last year for which there is complete data), a 33% increase.
- The number of log trucks involved in towaway crashes nearly doubled between 2019 and 2020, from 41 to 81.

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<sup>1</sup> USDOT; 2016. *Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Limits Study, Final Report to Congress*

<sup>2</sup> NHTSA 2020. *Fatality Analysis Reporting System, Data Visualization*

<sup>3</sup> USDOT; 2000. *Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Study*

<sup>4</sup> USDOT; 2016. *Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Limits Study, Final Report to Congress*

<sup>5</sup> Insurance Institute for Highway Safety; 2016. *Crash Risk Factors for Interstate Large Trucks in North Carolina*

- **Just ten days ago**, a GA professional truck driver hauling timber lost control of his truck and claimed nothing could be done about it, saying “his load shifted, causing the vehicle to become unbalanced and he simply couldn't regain control.”<sup>6</sup> This bill unequivocally makes this type of “unavoidable” crash MORE likely to occur and maim or other Georgian roadway users.



Figure 1: Jan 30, 2023, log truck crash in Washington County, GA (WGXA)

Everyday Georgians don't want more heavier large trucks on the same roads with our school buses, or near our children's bus stops, or near our young teenage drivers headed to schools in rural areas, nor do we want heavier large trucks traveling at highway speeds on the roads where our grandparents must cross the street to get to their mailboxes. This is a real danger in our rural areas where these heavier trucks will be travelling regularly. In 2020, 37% of fatal large truck crashes occurred in Non-Interstate Rural Areas. I cannot comprehend why the Georgia legislature seek to pass laws that are proven to lead to greater incidence of lethal truck crashes in our communities.

Beyond compelling safety concerns, research also proves that in the last 35 years, allowing heavier, overweight trucks results in MORE trucks on the roads not less. It also leads to faster degradation of critical infrastructure such as roads and bridges. **Heavier trucks will put a significant financial burden on Georgians at the city and county level.** Most of our roads and bridges, about 80%, are maintained by city and county governments and this bill will have a major negative impact on funds that should go towards schools, community public green areas, and other projects. Research indicates that an overweight 120,000-pound truck does TWICE the amount of pavement damage than an 80,000-pound truck causes when driven on roads not designed for these massive loads.<sup>7</sup> The proposed 90,000-pound allowance in **HB 189** will cause more damage to our roadways than what we already need to spend our precious funds on to repair. A whopping 38% of Georgia's bridges are in fair/poor condition. Our infrastructure is not built to withstand these loads and increasing allowable truck weights at this time would be a massive waste on newly allocated Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal funding that is meant to

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<sup>6</sup> <https://wgxa.tv/news/local/log-truck-crash-in-washington-county-traffic-wreck-accident-tractor-trailer-big-rig-highway-57>

<sup>7</sup> USDOT; 2016. *Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Limits Study, Final Report to Congress*

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modernize our transportation systems, not conduct expensive road maintenance at increasingly more frequent intervals.

Georgia's representatives should be taking action to decrease truck crash deaths, not increasing them. Please **safeguard Georgia's most important asset, its people**, as well as the critical infrastructure we all rely on from further deterioration. Passing **HB 189** will only make Georgia vulnerable to more catastrophic and horrific truck crashes. Please protect Georgia's families and spare them the loss of loved ones by keeping the current truck weight limits in Code Section 32-6-26 and by **opposing HB 189**. Georgia families will pay with their wallets and their lives if this bill becomes the law of the land.

Sincerely,

*Pamela Biddle*

Pamela Biddle, Board Member

Citizens for Reliable and Safe Highways (CRASH)

*ADDITIONALLY ENCLOSED: Recent articles regarding overweight trucks operating without a permit in Georgia*

<https://cdllife.com/2022/overloaded-trucker-told-cops-that-he-didnt-think-anyone-would-be-around-to-stop-him/>

<https://cdllife.com/2022/georgia-cops-nab-trucker-who-got-stuck-on-backroad-for-being-massively-overweight/>