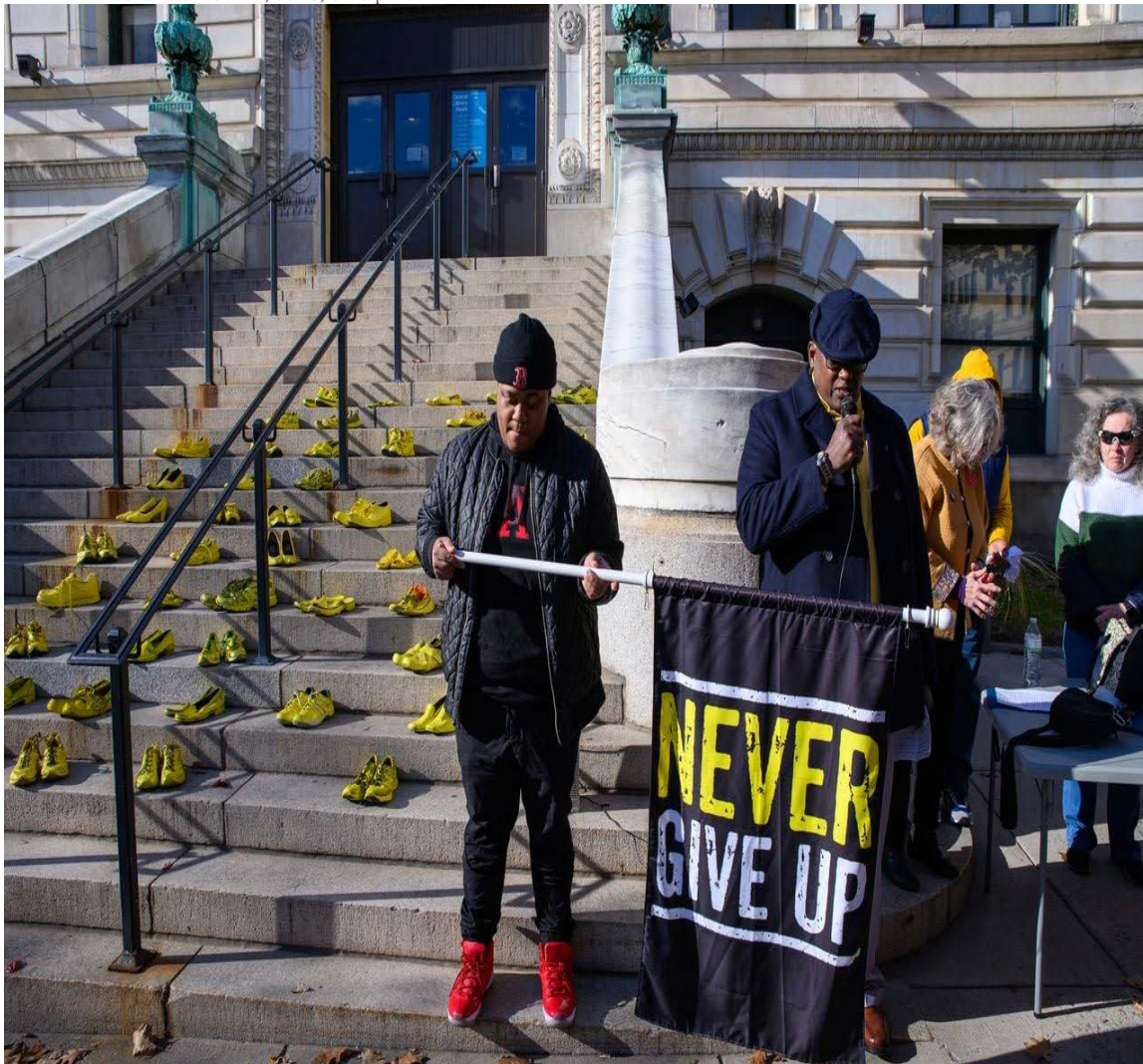


WalkBike organizations remember people killed on Hampden County roads

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Pastor Willie Ballard, right, of the Church of Living God in Chicopee, leads observers in prayer. Matthew Currin, left, an employee of American Medical Rescue, knows the outcome of traffic incidents all too well. (Sebastian Restrepo photo)Sebastian Restrepo

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A man struck and seriously injured as he crossed State Street near the Central Library on Oct. 27 has died of his injuries. On Sunday, his name was added to the list of 48 other people killed on Hampden County roads and streets in the past year.

Activists with Walk Bike Springfield announced Cooley's death at their annual [World Day of Remembrance](#) ceremony on the steps of Springfield Central Library. The day is held the third Sunday of each November to commemorate those who died either walking, biking or driving on municipal roads.

Cooley died more than a week after the crash. His death brings to three the number of people who died after being hit by vehicle traffic in that same area of State Street. In 2021, librarian Gayle Ball [was struck and killed](#) as she crossed the four-lane street toward the employee parking lot. In 2014, 7-year-old [Destiny Gonzales](#) was struck and killed as she crossed the street near the library with her mother and a cousin.

Cooley's passing also added to the number of Hampden County residents killed on the county's roads and streets in the year since the last remembrance ceremony. His passing increased the count of people killed on Hampden County roads to 49 for the year.



Betsy Johnson of WalkBike Springfield talks to observers about traffic victims, mentioning the proximity and frequency of incidents records just in front of Springfield central Library. (Sebastian Restrepo photo)Sebastian Restrepo

Activist Betsy Johnson said the annual Remembrance Day was held in conjunction with WalkRide Holyoke and WalkRide Chicopee members. The Springfield Central Library was chosen for the ceremony because it remains a dangerous area for pedestrians.

"We are here for the third straight year in a row because, unfortunately, nothing has been done," Johnson said. "They have done nothing to improve the crossing of pedestrians from the library parking lot. Yet another pedestrian just passed away last week."

Johnson said the city conducted engineering studies to determine the best way to safely allow pedestrians to cross the street at the library.

"They did an engineering study and supposedly they were going to narrow the street to one lane in each direction with a refuge island for walkers," she said. "First, they didn't have the money to do it, then now they do. Supposedly next spring it going to be built, except what Michael's death shows is it needs to be done now."

Johnson said the current layout of the street, with two lanes in each direction, allows traffic to build speed as it approaches the library.

"We have used a speed gun and people are going 40 or 50 miles an hour by then," she said. "It's posted 25 miles per hour, but no one is going 25 miles per hour."

WalkRide Springfield and like-minded organizations sprang from the 1995 creation of the European Federation of Road Traffic Victims. That group chose yellow as the color of the day. On Sunday, 49 pairs of yellow shoes lined the library stairs, one pair for each Hampden County death.



Shoes displayed Sunday in Springfield represent victims of traffic accidents from 2022 to today. (Sebastian Restrepo photo)Sebastian Restrepo

Johnson read a proclamation from Mayor Domenic Sarno saying the city remembers those killed in road accidents.

Sarno urged people to “keep our roadways safe, slow down, obey traffic, buckle up, put your phones away and pay attention.”

Holyoke Mayor Joshua Garcia issued a proclamation calling for the third Sunday in November to be a day of remembrance “for those lost and injured, and to pay tribute to those who work tirelessly to make our roads safer for all.”

Those lost

Johnson said that between November 2022 and this year, 19 people died on the roads in Springfield; 13 in Chicopee; three in Palmer; two in Southwick, Ludlow and Holyoke; and one in Holland, West Springfield, Longmeadow, Agawam, Brimfield and Westfield.

Each of those killed was represented by a pair of yellow shoes in the steps of the library.

State Sen. Jake Oliveira said he was honored to be invited to remember the victims, “but with the understanding that there is work to be done to ensure that all of our streets are safe.”



Springfield City Council President Jesse Lederman speaks Sunday about efforts to improve pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure to promote safety. (Sebastian Restrepo photo)Sebastian Restrepo