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## Advocacy Column

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**W**ill passing a three foot law improve on-road safety for RI cyclists?

In September 2007, Frank Cabral, Warwick resident and responsible cyclist, was killed while riding his bicycle on Route 1 in Charlestown, RI. As most NBW members know, Route 1 in that area has some of the widest paved shoulders in the state. Those wide shoulder did not protect Frank from the careless motorist who entered the break down lane, ran him down from behind, and killed him instantly.

Showing remarkable ability to turn her grief into important work, his wife, Lori DiBiasio, has become an advocate for passing legal protection for cyclists. As a result of her efforts, last year the Warwick City Council passed a resolution to request that the RI General Assembly enact legislation similar to the laws that have been enacted in the states of Florida and New Hampshire to require a three foot passing distance between motor vehicles passing bicycles. The resolution goes on to request a provision that if it is impossible to achieve the three foot passing distance, then the vehicle shall reduce its speed to 10-20 miles per hour below the posted speed limit, and to provide for a penalty requiring a fine, community service, and license suspension.

“Frank’s Law” was introduced to the General Assembly for adoption in the 2009 Session by RI Representatives Gemma, Flaherty, Ferri, and Trillo. The act includes the same requirements that motorists allow a three foot space between their vehicle and a bicycle when passing. Penalties for violations will be those included in

Section 31-41.4 of the General Laws in Chapter 31-41.1 entitled “Adjudication of Traffic Offenses”.

The value of this and other laws pertaining to bicyclists’ rights and responsibilities have caused lively discussions among NBW members and friends. At a recent public forum led by the Providence Bicycle Coalition members of the bicycling community expressed their concerns and suggestions to improve RI safety laws for cyclists. There was mutual agreement among those attending that our laws are sadly inadequate. Some felt that the proposed law should not be supported, but all agreed that our community needs to get serious about improving conditions for cyclists.

As Frank’s Law moves through the state system, it is our responsibility to be active to its success. It is important to contact your state Representatives and Senators via letter or email to urge support of our issues. It is equally important to attend committee hearings both to provide a statement of your position and to let law makers know that there are many of us and that we count. We don’t all agree that this bill should pass into state law, but we can be sure that nothing will happen to improve conditions for cyclists if we leave it to others to make a difference. If you find it important to improve our state laws make it your business to become active in this and future legal actions.

Last summer many members of the NBW rode in an organized ride along Route 1 that Lori organized in Frank’s memory. The ride served to remind us of our vulnerability on the road. Those who participated in the ride wear their t-shirts proudly to encourage all of us to ride in the second annual ride later this year.