



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY

May 24, 2017

The Honorable Greg Abbott
Governor of Texas
1100 San Jacinto
Austin, Texas 78701

Dear Governor Abbott:

I am writing to urge you to sign House Bill (HB) 62 into law on behalf of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates). Advocates is a coalition of consumer, safety, medical and public health groups, and insurance companies and organizations working together to prevent motor vehicle crashes, save lives, reduce injuries and contain crash costs. This commonsense legislation was passed with strong bi-partisan support in both the House and Senate and will improve safety on Texas roads and highways. If enacted into law, HB 62 will prohibit drivers from using wireless communication devices to read, write or send messages, including text messages, while operating a motor vehicle. The measure will also address the current patchwork of school zone and local texting bans which have made enforcement confusing and challenging.

Distracted driving is a serious public health and safety problem in Texas. According to the Texas Department of Transportation (TXDOT), in 2015 there were 476 deaths in motor vehicle crashes involving distracted driving, or an average of nine people killed every week of the year. The TXDOT also found that more than 100,000 traffic crashes each year involve distracted driving. Unfortunately, these disturbing facts are not surprising. According to a 2015 survey conducted by the Texas A&M Transportation Institute, over 20 percent of drivers admitted to reading or sending text messages or emails when behind the wheel.

Sending or receiving a text message causes a driver's eyes to be off the road for an average of 4.6 seconds. When driving at a speed of 55 miles per hour (mph) those few seconds are equivalent to driving the entire length of a football field, or 360 feet, while wearing a blindfold. Speed limits on many Texas roads are even higher so the distances traveled when texting while driving are even longer.

Texting while driving is increasing nationally and so are related deaths. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the percentage of drivers visibly manipulating hand-held devices while driving increased by 267 percent between 2009 and 2015. Nationally, fatalities in distraction-affected crashes jumped nearly 9 percent and killed 3,477 people in 2015.

Distracted driving not only results in needless crashes, deaths and injuries, but it also results in costs to the state and taxpayers. According to NHTSA, crashes in which at least one driver was identified as being distracted cost \$40 billion annually. Furthermore, government studies show that the economic cost of all motor vehicle crashes in Texas exceeds \$17 billion annually.

HB 62 will help to save lives. Advocates commends the Texas Legislature for passing this lifesaving legislation and strongly urges you to sign HB 62 into law.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Gillan
President