



November 22, 2019

The Honorable Charlie Baker  
Governor of Massachusetts  
Office of the Governor  
24 Beacon St., Room 280  
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Dear Governor Baker:

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates), an alliance of consumer, safety, medical and public health groups, and insurance companies working together to pass highway and auto safety laws that prevent crashes, save lives, reduce injuries, and contain costs, urges you to sign into law House Bill (H.) 4203. This legislation will improve safety on Massachusetts roads by broadening the current prohibition on drivers from using wireless communication devices to read, write or send text messages while operating a motor vehicle to include viewing non-navigational text, video and images and the expanded uses of portable electronic devices that have emerged. Considering the prevalence of distracted driving crashes, this legislation is critical, responsive and timely.

In 2018, 360 people were killed on Massachusetts roads, marking a four percent increase over 2017 (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)). Wireless communication device distraction is a serious issue contributing to crashes and deaths. According to the NHTSA, the percentage of drivers visibly manipulating hand-held devices while driving increased by 250 percent between 2009 and 2016. An August 2019 global study on distracted driving by Liberty Mutual Insurance confirmed our inability to put down technology while behind the wheel. The study found that 67 percent of Americans have used their phone while driving and that Americans reported higher rates of reading and sending emails or texts than Western Europeans. Those surveyed also admitted to using their phone more frequently while stopped at a red light or stop sign. Additionally, a survey performed by Nationwide Insurance found four out of ten respondents claimed to have been hit or nearly hit due to a distracted driver. In 2019, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) released an update to its 2014 roadside survey that found manipulation of devices while driving is up 57 percent over the prior survey. More can and should be done to eradicate driver distraction.

As wireless communication technology has developed from cellphones to smart phones, which are in actuality miniature computers, and the range of electronic communication platforms has significantly broadened to include apps, cameras, social media, gaming, etc., laws curbing driver distraction must be updated to address the ensuing distraction. H. 4203 will help prevent drivers taking their eyes off the road and their mind off the task of driving.

Distracted driving not only results in crashes, deaths and injuries, but it also unnecessarily expends taxpayer dollars. Crashes in which at least one driver was identified as being distracted cost \$40 billion annually (NHTSA). Nationally, distracted driver crashes cost businesses \$8.2 billion in 2013 (Network of Employers for Traffic Safety, 2016). The annual economic costs of all crashes in Massachusetts are nearly \$5.9 billion (NHTSA).

Each distracted driving death and serious injury irrevocably changes the lives of families and communities in Massachusetts and across the nation. We urge you to sign H. 4203, a critical measure to curb dangerous and deadly distracted driving.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Catherine Chase'.

Catherine Chase  
President