



ADVOCATES  
FOR HIGHWAY  
& AUTO SAFETY

February 5, 2021

The Honorable Allen Treadaway, Chair  
The Honorable Allen Farley, Vice Chair  
Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security  
Alabama House of Representatives  
11 South Union Street  
Montgomery, Alabama 36130

Dear Chairman Treadaway and Vice Chairman Farley:

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates), an alliance of consumer, safety, medical, public health and law enforcement groups, and insurance companies working together to pass highway and auto safety laws that prevent crashes, save lives, reduce injuries, and curb costs, urges you to support House Bill (HB) 90. This legislation will improve safety on Alabama 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 distracting viewing of non-navigational content and manual use. Considering the prevalence of distracted driving crashes, this legislation is critical, responsive and timely.

In 2019, 930 people were killed on Alabama roads (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)). Wireless communication device distraction, which includes manual, visual and cognitive components, 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. The NHTSA survey, *National Telephone Survey on Distracted Driving Attitudes and Behaviors – 2015*, noted that twice as many respondents admitted to talking on a cell phone or texting when they were involved in a crash or a near crash in 2015 as compared to 2010. 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. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) released a roadside survey in 2019 that found manipulation of devices while driving is up 57 percent over the prior 2014 survey while handheld use decreased.<sup>i</sup> More can and should be done to eradicate driver distraction.

As wireless communication technology has developed from cellphones to smart phones, 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 keep pace with the technology and ensuing distraction. A 2016 survey conducted by State Farm found that accessing the internet, reading and updating social media networks on a cell phone while driving more than doubled from 2009 to 2016, and about 10 percent of those surveyed in 2016 were also playing games on a cell phone while driving.<sup>ii</sup> Provisions in HB 90 to restrict use of the “camera, video, or gaming features or functions for viewing, recording, amusement, or other non-navigational functions” whether the device is handheld or dash mounted will help to curb visual distraction, as restrictions on handheld use and entering information into a dash mounted device will curb manual distraction.

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found that the use of devices while driving can result in mental distractions that can persist for up to 27 seconds after returning to the driving task.<sup>iii</sup> According to research on driver cognitive distraction compiled by IIHS<sup>iv</sup>, “researchers have found that brain activity associated with visual processing and attention is suppressed when drivers are cognitively distracted ([Bowyer et al., 2009](#); [Strayer et al., 2006](#); [Just et al., 2008](#)).” As a result, “cognitive distractions can lead to so-called ‘inattention blindness’ in which drivers fail to comprehend or process information from objects in the

roadway even when they are looking at them ([Strayer et al., 2003](#))”. Limitations on handheld and hands-free device use provided in HB 90 will help prevent drivers from 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 Alabama are nearly \$4.5 billion (NHTSA).

Each distracted driving death and serious injury irrevocably changes the lives of families and communities in Alabama and across the nation. We urge you to support HB 90, a critical measure to curb dangerous and deadly distracted driving.

Sincerely,



Catherine Chase  
President

cc: The Honorable Thomas Jackson, Ranking Minority Member  
Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security Members

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<sup>i</sup> IIHS, *Driver cellphone interactions increase 57 percent*, January 24, 2019.

<sup>ii</sup> Texting While Driving Includes Growing Mobile Web Use, <https://www.statefarm.com/simple-insights/auto-and-vehicles/distracted-driving-includes-growing-mobile-web-use>

<sup>iii</sup> AAA Newsroom, *New Hands-free Technologies Pose Hidden Dangers for Drivers*, October 22, 2015.

<sup>iv</sup> IIHS HLDI, Topics, Distracted Driving, available here: <https://www.iihs.org/topics/distracted-driving>.