



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY

March 30, 2021

The Honorable Chris Murphy, Chair
The Honorable John Richard C. King, First Vice Chair
The Honorable Neal A. Collins, Second Vice Chair
House Judiciary Committee
South Carolina Legislature
1105 Pendleton Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Dear Chairperson Murphy, Vice Chairperson King and Vice Chairperson Collins:

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) 3360/ Senate Bill (SB) 248. This legislation will improve safety on South Carolina 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 and manual use. Considering the prevalence of distracted driving crashes, this legislation is critical, responsive and timely.

In 2019, 1,001 people were killed on South Carolina 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.ⁱ 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.ⁱⁱ Provisions in HB 3360/ SB 248 to restrict non-navigational functions including viewing of video and movies 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.ⁱⁱⁱ According to research on driver cognitive distraction compiled by IIHS,^{iv} “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](#)).” Preventing use while stopped in traffic and limitations on handheld and hands-free device use provided in HB 3360/ SB 248 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). In 2018, distracted driving crashes cost employers nearly \$19 billion.^v The annual economic costs of all crashes in South Carolina are more than \$4 billion (NHTSA).

Each distracted driving death and serious injury irrevocably changes the lives of families and communities in South Carolina. We urge you to support HB 3360/ SB 248, a critical measure to curb dangerous and deadly distracted driving.

Sincerely,



Catherine Chase
President

cc: House Judiciary Committee Members

ⁱ IIHS, *Driver cellphone interactions increase 57 percent*, January 24, 2019.

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

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

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

^v Cost of Motor Vehicle Crashes to Employers 2019, NETS, available at <https://trafficsafety.org/?ddownload=26813>