



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY



February 25, 2022

The Honorable Justin Brown, Chair
The Honorable Jason Bean, Vice-Chair
Senate Committee on Transportation, Infrastructure and Public Safety
Missouri General Assembly
201 W. Capitol Avenue
Jefferson City, Missouri 65101

Dear Chair Brown and Vice-Chair Bean:

As leading safety organizations working together to pass highway and auto safety laws that prevent crashes, deaths and injuries, and contain costs, we urge you to you to support Senate Bill (SB) 713 to curb distracted driving, a persistent killer on our roads. Missouri is one of only two states that has yet to enact a ban on texting for all drivers. Nor has the state taken action to further curb use by novice, inexperienced young drivers. More can and should be done to reduce the prevalence of visual, manual and cognitive driver distraction caused by device use.

Wireless communication device 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. Distracted driving laws should curb manual use of devices, known as a hands-free requirement or a hand-held prohibition, and couple this measure with provisions to also restrict distracting viewing of devices such as accessing the internet, reading and updating social media networks, video chatting and streaming video. These provisions can help to deter deadly device use behind the wheel. It also simplifies enforcement as police can curb hand-held device use and distracting viewing for all drivers rather than limiting intervention to texting for drivers under age 21. SB 713 revises the current distracted driving law to address these issues.

A 2021 [report](#), *Using Electronic Devices While Driving: Legislations and Enforcement Implications*, by the Transportation Research Board (TRB) comprehensively reviewed the issue of distracted driving and state distracted driving laws. The report identifies key components in a model distracted driving law including language banning texting (whether the device is hand-held or hands-free) and providing “more stringent restrictions for drivers under 18 years of age.”ⁱⁱ SB 713 would upgrade Missouri’s distracted driving law to extend the texting ban to all drivers and includes additional restrictions on device use by drivers under 18 years of age or who have an instruction permit or an intermediate license. The report also identifies provisions that prohibit hand-held use of devices and the use of “an electronic device to stream, record, or broadcast video. This includes when the device is used hands free (mounted, affixed, or resting somewhere in the vehicle).”ⁱⁱⁱ Provisions in SB 713 prohibit viewing of electronic messages and diverting the driver’s attention from the operation of the vehicle. Additionally, the TRB report recommends that state laws “be in effect at all times when the vehicle is traveling on public roads, this includes at stop lights and when temporarily slowed or stopped in traffic.”ⁱⁱⁱ An upgrade in SB 713 would help to prevent use while in a lane of traffic.

The public has a keen understanding about the issue of distracted driving and supports improvements to curb its incidence as revealed by a new public opinion poll. A national public opinion poll, *ENGINE INSIGHTS using the CARAVAN Survey, December 15-19, 2021*, found that: 98% are concerned about distracted driving with 84% “extremely” or “very” concerned;” concern about distracted driving is widespread among respondents by age, generation, region, political party, and type of community; and, a strong majority agrees that not enough is being done to reduce dangerous behavior on our roadways. Notably, this response was fairly consistent across political party (66 percent of Republicans, 64 percent of Democrats, and 73 percent of Independents).

In the first nine months of 2021, 789 people were killed on Missouri roads according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), an eight percent increase in traffic fatalities over the same period in 2020. Missouri families and visitors should not have to suffer these preventable losses when solutions are known and available. Taking action to upgrade the state’s distracted driving law is commonsense and timely.

Sincerely,



Cathy Chase, President
Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety



Janette Fennell, Founder & President
Kids and Car Safety

cc: Senate Committee on Transportation, Infrastructure and Public Safety Members

ⁱ Using Electronic Devices While Driving: Legislations and Enforcement Implications (2021), TRB, https://www.nap.edu/cart/download.cgi?record_id=26082

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.