



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY



March 29, 2022

The Honorable Ben Baker, Chair
The Honorable Adam Schnelting, Vice-Chair
House Committee on Downsizing State Government
Missouri General Assembly
201 W. Capitol Avenue
Jefferson City, Missouri 65101

Dear Chair Baker and Vice-Chair Schnelting:

As leading safety organizations working together to advance highway and auto safety laws that prevent crashes, deaths and injuries, and contain costs, we urge you to support House Bill (HB) 1487 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. The state also has not taken action to further restrict mobile device 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.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reported that 798 people died on Missouri roads in the first nine months of 2021, marking an eight percent increase in traffic fatalities over the same period in 2020. Distracted driving is a major contributing factor to traffic crashes, and its incidence is known to be underreported. 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 addressing driver distraction must be updated to keep pace with the technology and ensuing distraction.

Expanding the current distracted driving law, which is limited to a texting ban for drivers younger than age 21, to more broadly restrict manual use of devices, known as a hands-free requirement or a hand-held prohibition, and coupling 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, can help to deter deadly device use behind the wheel. HB 1487 accomplishes these improvements, and it also simplifies enforcement as police can prevent hand-held device use and distracting viewing rather than limiting intervention to texting.

A 2021 [report](#), *Using Electronic Devices While Driving: Legislation 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.”ⁱ 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).”ⁱⁱ 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 included in HB 1487 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 recent 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).

Missouri families and visitors should not have to suffer preventable losses when solutions are known and available. Taking action to upgrade the state’s distracted driving law is commonsense and timely.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Cathy Chase, President
Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety



Janette Fennell, Founder & President
Kids and Car Safety

cc: House Committee on Downsizing State Government 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.