



April 13, 2023

The Honorable Ram Villivalam, Chair
The Honorable Christopher Belt, Vice Chair
Committee on Transportation
Illinois Senate
State Capitol, 401 S. Spring Street
Springfield, Illinois 62706

Dear Chair Villivalam and Vice Chair Belt:

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates) is an alliance of consumer, safety, law enforcement, medical and public health groups, and insurance companies and agents working to advance laws proven to prevent crashes, deaths and injuries on our roads and contain related costs. We urge you to support House Bill (HB) 2431. This legislation will improve safety on Illinois roads by broadening the current prohibition on distracted driving to include watching or streaming video, video conferencing and social media. Considering the prevalence of distracted driving crashes, more 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 in 2021, 1,338 people were killed on Illinois roads, a nearly 12 percent increase over 2020.ⁱ Wireless communication device distraction is a serious issue contributing to crashes and deaths. New data from NHTSA finds a 12 percent spike in distraction-affected crash deaths from 3,154 in 2020 to 3,522 in 2021; this accounted for more than eight percent of all fatalities reported in 2021.ⁱⁱ In 2020, the most recent year statistics were available, over 300,000 people were injured in distraction-affected crashes. This is not a complete representation of this roadway public health crisis, and the true impact is uncertain because of underreporting. Clearly the magnitude of this problem requires the advancement of proven countermeasures.

Wireless communication device technology has rapidly developed and expanded, and drivers today have access to a broad and growing range of electronic devices and platforms. To effectively curb distracted driving, laws must cover the wide variety of electronic device communication options. Even the use of so-called hands-free devices causes distraction. Voice-to-text and/or dashboard-mounted options can divert the driver's attention from the road. Hands-free is not distraction-free. Further, the percentage of drivers holding cell phones to their ears while driving was 2.5 in 2021 according to NHTSA. This rate translates into nearly 373,000 passenger vehicles driven by people using hand-held cell phones at a typical daylight moment in 2021.ⁱⁱⁱ HB 2431 will help to deter 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. In 2019, distraction-affected crashes caused \$98 billion in economic costs to the U.S. and represented 29 percent of total crash costs.^{iv} Nationally, distracted driver crashes cost businesses \$19 billion in 2018 (Network of Employers for Traffic Safety, 2019). The annual economic costs of all crashes in Illinois are nearly \$14 billion (NHTSA).^v

Each distracted driving death and serious injury irrevocably changes the lives of families and communities in Illinois and across the nation. We urge you to support HB 2431, a critical measure to curb dangerous and deadly distracted driving.

Sincerely,

Catherine Chase
President

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- ⁱ Stewart, T. (2023, April). Overview of motor vehicle traffic crashes in 2021 (Report No. DOT HS 813 435). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.
- ⁱⁱ Stewart, T. (2023, April). Overview of motor vehicle traffic crashes in 2021 (Report No. DOT HS 813 435). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Traffic Safety Facts Research Note: Driver Electronic Device Use in 2021, Aug. 2022, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 357, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813357>.
- ^{iv} Blincoe, L., Miller, T., Wang, J.-S., Swedler, D., Coughlin, T., Lawrence, B., Guo, F., Klauer, S., & Dingus, T. (2022, December). The economic and societal impact of motor vehicle crashes, 2019 (Report No. DOT HS 813 403). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.
- ^v Blincoe, L., Miller, T., Wang, J.-S., Swedler, D., Coughlin, T., Lawrence, B., Guo, F., Klauer, S., & Dingus, T. (2022, December). The economic and societal impact of motor vehicle crashes, 2019 (Report No. DOT HS 813 403). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.