



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY

January 28, 2025

The Honorable Ann Meyer, Chair
House Transportation Committee Subcommittee
Iowa Legislature
1007 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

Dear Chair Meyer:

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates), which is 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 contain costs, supports Senate File (SF) 22/House Study Bill (HSB) 64 to curb distracted driving while offering recommendations to improve the bills' efficacy based on research and experience.

In 2023, an estimated 376 people were killed in motor vehicle crashes in Iowa.ⁱ This represents a 17 percent increase since 2014.ⁱⁱ In the U.S. in 2022, 3,308 people were killed in crashes involving a distracted driver, accounting for 8 percent of all crash fatalities.ⁱⁱⁱ Nonoccupants (pedestrians, bicyclists, and others) accounted for 19 percent (621) of distraction-affected fatalities in 2022.^{iv} An estimated 289,310 people were injured in distraction-affected crashes in 2022.^v It is important to note that distracted driving crashes are known to be underreported due to differences in police crash report coding, database limitations and other challenges.

Distracted driving not only results in crashes, deaths and injuries, but it also unnecessarily expends taxpayer dollars. Nationally, crashes in which at least one driver was identified as being distracted imposed an economic cost of \$98.2 billion in 2019.^{vi} In 2018 alone, distracted driving crashes cost employers nearly \$19 billion.^{vii} Iowa incurs approximately \$2.8 billion in economic harm annually due to motor vehicle crashes, which is equivalent to \$885 per resident each year according to a 2019 analysis.^{viii} When updated for inflation alone, in 2024, costs would equate to \$3.42 billion to the state and \$1,084 per resident respectively.^{ix}

Distracted driving's impact and incidence must be addressed. Smart phone capability, usage and the broadening range of distracting electronic communication platforms and options (including apps, social media, gaming, video chatting) have grown rapidly. These devices can now easily accomplish myriad uses without holding or consistently physically engaging with a device (voice-to-text and/or dash mounted options), yet these uses may continue to foster driver distraction. As such, laws that seek to ban hand-held device use must also address cognitive and visual distractions. To meaningfully address the prevalence and dangers of distracted driving, visual, manual and cognitive distractions should be restricted for drivers, and additional restrictions should be imposed upon inexperienced novice drivers.

To attain this safety outcome, we encourage you to amend the bill to accomplish the following:

- Ensure the bill will cover the myriad device options that promote distracted viewing. The measure would exclude accessing non-navigational video content, video calls, video streaming, accessing gaming data, or reading an electronic message or notification from the hands-free/voice-activated exemption. We recommend clarifying that "writing" and "sending" such communications, as is the case under current law, continue to be prohibited. In addition, the legislation should be broadened to include all applications to minimize activities that lead to visual and cognitive distraction. This will ensure the law has an "evergreen" component as new distracting communication and entertainment options emerge.
- Retain the ban on electronic device usage for novice drivers. Inexperienced drivers who are learning the skills needed to drive must fully focus on the driving task to ensure their safety and the safety of other

road users. Accordingly, novice drivers operating under an instruction permit, intermediate license, special minor's license or restricted work license should be prohibited from any electronic device usage while operating a motor vehicle, with allowable exceptions for emergencies and global positioning system (GPS) usage to provide driving directions. Iowa's current law banning graduated driver licensing (GDL) drivers from using electronic devices should be retained to ensure that young drivers learning to drive are fully focused on the driving task.

This approach is supported by the 2021 [report](#), *Using Electronic Devices While Driving: Legislations and Enforcement Implications*,^x by the Transportation Research Board (TRB) which comprehensively reviewed the issue of distracted driving and state distracted driving laws. The report identifies key components in a model distracted driving law including:

- 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).
- Language banning texting should include whether done in a hand-held or hands-free manner.
- Adding more stringent restrictions for minors. Young novice drivers are the most distracted and the most at risk. Per mile driven, teen drivers have crash rates nearly four times higher than drivers aged 20 and older.^{xi} Young drivers, ages 15-20, also have the highest proportion of distraction-related fatal crashes.^{xii}

We urge you to advance SF 22/HSB 64 and to incorporate the identified upgrades, especially the recommendation to retain the ban on electronic device use by young novice drivers, to improve the bill further.

Sincerely,



Catherine Chase, President

ⁱ Traffic Safety Facts: Crash Stats, Early Estimate of Motor Vehicle Traffic Fatalities in 2023, NHTSA, April 2024, DOT HS 813 561, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813561>.

ⁱⁱ State Traffic Safety Information for Iowa (2022), NHTSA, available at <https://edan.dot.gov/STSI/stsi.htm>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Traffic Safety Facts Research Note: Distracted Driving 2022, April 2024, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 559, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813559>.

^{iv} Ibid.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2019, NHTSA, Feb. 2023, DOT HS 813 403, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813403>.

^{vii} Cost of Motor Vehicle Crashes to Employers 2019, NETS, 2018 data expressed in 2019 \$, available at <https://trafficsafety.org/?ddownload=26813>.

^{viii} The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2019, NHTSA, Feb. 2023, DOT HS 813 403, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813403>.

^{ix} CPI Inflation Calculator, BLS, January 2019 to January 2024 dollars, available [here](#).

^x Using Electronic Devices While Driving: Legislations and Enforcement Implications (2021), available at <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/read/26082/chapter/1>.

^{xi} Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), Teenagers, available at <https://www.iihs.org/topics/teenagers#by-the-numbers>.

^{xii} Traffic Safety Facts Research Note: Distracted Driving 2021, NHTSA, May 2023, DOT HS 813 443, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813443>.