



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY

April 21, 2025

The Honorable Thomas C. Alexander, Senate President
The Honorable A. Shane Massey, Majority Leader
The Honorable Brad Hutto, Minority Leader
South Carolina Legislature
1105 Pendleton Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Dear President Alexander, Majority Leader Massey and Minority Leader Hutto:

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 House Bill (HB) 3276 to curb distracted driving while offering recommendations to improve the bill's efficacy based on research and experience.

Across the Nation in 2023, 3,275 people were killed in crashes involving a distracted driver, accounting for 8 percent of all crash fatalities.ⁱ Nonoccupants (pedestrians, bicyclists, and others) accounted for 19 percent (621) of distraction-affected fatalities in 2022.ⁱⁱ An estimated 289,310 people were injured in distraction-affected crashes in 2022.ⁱⁱⁱ 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.^{iv} In 2018 alone, distracted driving crashes cost employers nearly \$19 billion.^v South Carolina incurs approximately \$6.3 billion in economic harm annually due to motor vehicle crashes, which is equivalent to \$1,218 per resident each year according to a 2019 analysis.^{vi} When updated for inflation alone, in 2025, costs would equate to \$7.91 billion to the state and \$1,537 per resident.^{vii}

Distracted driving's impact and incidence must be addressed. Smart phone capability and usage and the 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. To meaningfully address the prevalence and dangers of distracted driving, visual, manual and cognitive distractions should be restricted for drivers. HB 3276 includes a manual use ban and provisions to update the law to curb visual and cognitive distractions. However, the bill can be improved.

We encourage you to amend the bill to accomplish the following:

- Add a 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 a graduated driver licensing (GDL) program 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. Given the benefits of a GDL phone ban, most states, including North Carolina and Tennessee, ban this action.
- Prohibit device use when a vehicle is stopped in a lane of traffic. The bill permits device use when a vehicle is parked or stopped. We suggest amending the bill to prohibit device use unless a vehicle is lawfully parked off a roadway. The current bill language will permit drivers to use their devices while temporarily stopped at a traffic light or stop sign and distract the driver from being cognizant of their

surroundings, thereby endangering others, including vulnerable road users. Sending or receiving a text message causes the driver’s eyes to be off the road for an average of 4.6 seconds. When driving 55 miles per hour (mph), this is the equivalent of driving the entire length of a football field blind.^{viii}

These recommendations are supported by the 2021 [report](#), *Using Electronic Devices While Driving: Legislations and Enforcement Implications*,^{ix} by the Transportation Research Board (TRB) which comprehensively reviewed the issue of distracted driving and state distracted driving laws. It identifies key components in a model distracted driving law including:

- Prohibiting device use when temporarily stopped on a road. Restrictions to “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.”
- 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.^x Young drivers, ages 15-20, also have the highest proportion of distraction-related fatal crashes.^{xi}

In 2023, 1,047 people were killed in motor vehicle crashes in South Carolina.^{xii} This represents a 27 percent increase since 2014.^{xiii} We urge you to advance HB 3276 and to incorporate the identified upgrades to enhance safety for all road users.

Sincerely,



Catherine Chase, President

ⁱ Overview of Motor Vehicle Crashes in 2023, NHTSA, Apr. 2025, DOT HS 813 705, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/Publication/813705>.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} 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>.

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

^{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} CPI Inflation Calculator, BLS, January 2019 to January 2025 dollars, available [here](#).

^{viii} Blueprint for Ending Distracted Driving, NHTSA, June 2012, DOT HS 811 629, available at <https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.dot.gov/files/811629.pdf>.

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

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

^{xi} 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>.

^{xii} State Traffic Safety Information for South Carolina, NHTSA, available at <https://cdan.dot.gov/STSI/stsi.htm>.

^{xiii} State Traffic Safety Information for South Carolina, NHTSA, available at <https://cdan.dot.gov/STSI/stsi.htm>.