



May 21, 2025

The Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Majority Leader
The Honorable Michael Gianaris, Deputy Majority Leader
The Honorable Robert G. Ort, Minority Leader
New York State Senate
Legislative Office Building
Albany, New York 12248

Dear Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, Deputy Majority Leader Gianaris and Minority Leader Ort:

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates), 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 enactment of Senate Bill (S.) 3240/Assembly Bill (A.) 348. This legislation will improve safety by prohibiting school bus drivers from using mobile telephones while driving when students are on board. Current law permits hands-free use of mobile devices. Hands-free is not distraction free and thereby places child passengers and other road users at risk when school bus drivers are distracted by their mobile device. Considering the prevalence of distracted driving crashes, this legislation is critical and timely.

In 2023, 1,114 were killed in traffic crashes in the Empire State.¹ New York had 563 reported fatal crashes involving distracted driving from 2017-2021, placing it within the top ten states for the highest percentage of fatal crashes in which distracted driving was a factor.² It's 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.

Wireless communication device distraction, which includes manual, visual and cognitive components, is a serious issue contributing to crashes. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found that the use of electronic devices while driving can result in mental distractions that persist for up to 27 seconds after returning to the driving task.³ According to research on driver cognitive distraction compiled by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), "brain activity associated with visual processing and attention is suppressed when drivers are cognitively distracted ([Bowyer et al., 2009](#); [Strayer et al., 2006](#); [Just et al., 2008](#))."⁴ As a result, "cognitive distractions can lead to so-called 'inattention blindness' in which drivers fail to comprehend or process information from objects in the roadway even when they are looking at them ([Strayer et al., 2003](#))."⁵

School bus related crashes resulted in the loss of nine lives in New York in 2022, and a third of these fatalities involved a distracted driver.⁶ Enacting S. 3240/A. 348 will deter school bus drivers from mobile device use and keep their mind on the task of safely transporting school children.

Each distracted driving death and serious injury irrevocably changes the lives of families and communities in New York and across the nation. We urge the Senate to act this year by passing S. 3240/A. 348, a critical measure to curb dangerous and deadly distracted driving and keep precious school children and other road users safe.

Sincerely,

Catherine Chase, President

¹ State Traffic Safety Information for New York, NHTSA, available at <https://cdan.dot.gov/STSI/stsi.htm>.

² "States with the highest rate of distracted driving deaths: Where does New York rank?" Staten Island Advance. (2023, May 8), available [here](#).

³ AAA Newsroom, New Hands-free Technologies Pose Hidden Dangers for Drivers, October 22, 2015, available [here](#).

⁴ IIHS HLDI, Topics, Distracted Driving, available at: <https://www.iihs.org/topics/distracted-driving>.

⁵ IIHS HLDI, Topics, Distracted Driving, available at: <https://www.iihs.org/topics/distracted-driving>.

⁶ Injury Facts, School Bus Crashes, National Safety Council, available at <https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/motor-vehicle/road-users/school-bus/>.