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- **Ohio State Highway Patrol**



Proponent Testimony for House Bill 95
House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
Staff Lieutenant Ed Mejia
Ohio State Highway Patrol

Chairman Green, Vice Chairman Greenspan, ranking member Sheehy and members of the House Transportation and Public Safety Committee, I am Staff Lieutenant Ed Mejia with the Ohio State Highway Patrol. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of House Bill 95. I have served with the division for nearly 27 years, over 24 of which were in field assignments where I witnessed firsthand, countless occasions of distracted driving.

Distracted driving is any non-driving activity a person engages in that has the potential to distract him or her from the primary task of driving and increases the risk of crashing.

Distractions include:

- Texting
- Using a cell phone or smartphone
- Eating and drinking
- Grooming
- Reading

Distractions can be visual (taking eyes off the road), manual (taking hands off the wheel), or cognitive (taking mind off what you're doing). Since texting involves all three, it is particularly dangerous.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), 10% (2,955) of U.S. fatal crashes in 2014 were reported as distraction-affected. These crashes killed 3,179

people and injured an estimated 431,000 more. In 13% of these crashes, the distraction was talking on, listening to, or manipulating a cell phone.

According to crash data from the Ohio Department of Public Safety, in 2016, 13,994 drivers in Ohio crashed while being distracted by something within their vehicles. Twenty-six (26) of these drivers were in fatal crashes which resulted in 27 deaths. Another 4,965 drivers were in injury crashes resulting in 7,293 injuries. The number of reported distracted driver's rose 5% in 2016 over the previous year after rising 11% from 2014 to 2015.

The biggest distraction category reported in 2016 in Ohio was "Other Inside the Vehicle" (e.g., passengers, food and/or drinks) which comprised 60% of all distracted drivers and 50% of distracted drivers in fatal crashes (up from 44% in 2015). "Phone" and "Texting/Emailing" were the listed distractions for 23% of all distracted drivers in 2016, but 38% of distracted drivers in fatal crashes.

Sending or receiving a text message takes a driver's eyes off the road for an average of 4.6 seconds, the equivalent of driving the length of an entire football field when traveling at 55 mph.

Every time someone takes their eyes or their focus off the road - even for just a few seconds - they put their lives and the lives of others in danger. Distracted driving is unsafe and careless. In a split second, its consequences can be devastating.

In summary, HB 95 establishes "distracted driving" as an enhanced penalty that can apply to certain moving violations that already exist under Ohio law. The legislation recognizes the fact that distractions behind the wheel can result from other activities that impair a person's ability to safely drive a car, not just those that involving cell phones and other electronic devices. Currently, Ohio law bans all "electronic wireless communication device" usage for drivers under 18. Texting while driving is illegal for all drivers but only as a secondary offense.

Chairman Green and members of the Committee, I thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 95. We can all agree that there are many distractions that can contribute to dangerous roadways. The Ohio State Highway Patrol believes that passage of this legislation will help to make our roads safer. I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.