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Senate Bill 285
Senate Local Government, Public Safety, and Veterans Affairs Committee
May 27, 2020
William Murdock, MORPC Executive Director
Written Proponent Testimony

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Maharath and members of the Senate Local Government, Public Safety, and Veterans Affairs Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written proponent testimony on Senate Bill 285 (SB 285), which provides necessary measures to curb distracted driving and save lives.

My name is William Murdock and I am the Executive Director of the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC). MORPC is a voluntary association of over 70 local governments across Central Ohio's rural, suburban, and urban areas. We provide programs, services, and funding related to transportation, land use, data, sustainability, and economic prosperity. Our role in transportation in our region is critical. MORPC serves as the federally designated metropolitan planning organization, or MPO, for transportation planning in the Columbus urbanized area. This means MORPC has transportation responsibilities and funding per federal law. We also work on transportation planning for rural areas throughout Central Ohio. Seven counties in our region, surrounding the MPO, recently formed the Central Ohio Rural Planning Organization (CORPO). We provide the staff and technical assistance which is valuable added transportation planning capacity for our rural and growing areas. It's also part of the rural transportation organization program with the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT). We also work with our communities to access other transportation programs from the Ohio Public Works Commission, Ohio Development Services, and more. One of our chief public policy goals is to achieve an advanced, inclusive, and exceptional transportation system that connects Central Ohio's people and products to the world.

Transportation technology is evolving quickly, and we consider ourselves lucky to be working on transformative transportation policy during this period of innovation. Advances in technology can increase efficiency, heighten safety, and provide better services. Yet, technology can be a double-edged sword and distracted driving is an unintended consequence of such advancement.

Distracted driving is a growing trend that has caused an increase in deaths and injuries on our roads. In 2017, in Central Ohio alone, there were 211 fatalities and 1,413 serious injuries from accidents. This is devastating for too many families here and across Ohio. And there's an economic cost; MORPC estimates the societal cost of these serious accidents is \$4.04 billion. As a State we are not doing enough on transportation safety. While we are performing better than average in some metrics, "better than average" does not comfort the hundreds of families affected. "Better than average" is not good enough. Therefore, we strongly advocate for increased measures to protect Ohio residents.

William Murdock, AICP
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MORPC has a long history of working closely with local communities to ensure that residents are safe while traveling. Our safety program staff actively analyze crash data, so we can better understand why crashes occur and how certain populations, behaviors, and locations are more susceptible to a deadly traffic crash. Furthermore, MORPC has an internal policy that bans staff from distracted driving. It is for these reasons and more that we strongly support SB 285.

SB 285 broadens the existing texting-while-driving prohibition in the ORC to prohibit using an electronic wireless communications device (EWCD) while driving and makes the use of an EWCD-while-driving a primary offense, rather than a secondary offense. The bill also requires the Director of Public Safety to expand driver's education regarding distracted driving and erect signs regarding the new EWCD-while-driving law throughout the state. In short, SB 285 provides law enforcement with the necessary tools to deter distracted driving.

We commend Governor DeWine, Senator Kunze, and Senator O'Brien for their leadership on this critical issue. MORPC strongly advocates for the passage of SB 285 to help protect all Ohioans. We sincerely appreciate the committee's work on such an important and critical issue and urge you to consider some potential amendments. Although it is urgent for us to pass this bill, we must be mindful of potential unintended consequences. In the book *Suspect Citizens: What 20 Million Traffic Stops Tell Us About Policing and Race* Frank R. Baumgartner, Derek A. Epp, and Kelsey Shoub found that compared to their share in the population, blacks are almost twice as likely to be pulled over as whites, even though whites drive more on average. They also discovered that blacks are more likely to be searched following a stop. Just by getting in a car, a black driver has about twice the odds of being pulled over, and about four times the odds of being searched. We respectfully request that the committee consider an amendment to the bill that would require the law enforcement officer to inform a person who is pulled over for distracted driving that they have the right to decline a search of their vehicle. We also ask that the committee consider some type of data mechanism of people who are pulled over for distracted driving, to ensure minorities are not specifically being targeted.

In conclusion, we support SB 285 because it curtails unsafe driving. We believe it is critical to provide law enforcement the necessary tools to deter distracted driving. Doing such will save lives and make our roads safer for everyone. We must make the use of wireless devices behind the wheel as unacceptable as drinking and driving is today, and we believe that tougher consequences will be a strong deterrent.

Thank you again for the opportunity to express MORPC's support of this important bill. Please do not hesitate to contact me, at 614-233- 4101 or at wmurdock@morpc.org, with any questions or whenever MORPC can be of service.

Kind Regards,



William Murdock, AICP
MORPC Executive Director