



Senate Bill 285

Written Testimony of Chris Runyan

President, Ohio Contractors Association and Chair of the FOR Ohio Coalition

Senate Local Government, Public Safety and Veterans Affairs Committee

May 27, 2020

Chairman Manning, Ranking Minority Member Maharath, and members of the Senate State Government, Public Safety and Veterans Affairs Committee, my name is Chris Runyan and I am the President of the Ohio Contractors Association (OCA). I also serve as the Chair of the Fix Our Roads Ohio (FOR Ohio) Coalition. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written proponent testimony for Senate Bill 285 on behalf of OCA and FOR Ohio.

OCA is the trade association representing Ohio's heavy/highway construction industry. On behalf of our more than 500 members representing all aspects of the design, construction, and maintenance of Ohio's infrastructure system, I am pleased to support Senate Bill 285 and its goal of reducing distracted driving in our state.

For the more than 115,000 individuals employed in the heavy/highway construction industry enhancing Ohio's distracted driving law is an important tool in addressing work zone safety. The men and women you see working along Ohio's roadways are our members. These hardworking and highly skilled individuals put their lives on the line each and every day to build and maintain Ohio's vast infrastructure network. While this work is inherently dangerous, it becomes even more dangerous when motorists travel through a work zone paying more attention to their hand-held cellular device than to their driving.

In 2019 there were 6,574 work zone crashes in Ohio, an all-time record. That number represents a 40 percent increase from 2018. Of those 6,574 crashes, 1,121 involved injuries with 129 being serious injuries resulting in 16 deaths. And, tragically two construction workers lost their lives. For 2020 preliminary data through March shows the trend will continue to grow.

We are grateful to Senators Kunze and O'Brien for recognizing the need to protect and promote the safety of highway workers by including a provision in SB 285 that would double fines for distracted driving offenses occurring in a work zone. Just like current law that allows fines for speeding and other traffic infractions to be doubled, these penalties would only occur when workers are present.

Efforts to address distracted driving and make Ohio's roadways safer are appreciated and encouraged by OCA. Doing so will make Ohio roadways safer and help protect the lives of the men and women that have chosen a career in highway construction. On their behalf, I encourage your support for SB 285.

Shifting to my role as Chair of the FOR Ohio Coalition, I also encourage your support for SB 285. FOR Ohio, a diverse group of Ohioans with a shared interest in the future of our state's economy and lifestyle, came together in 2018 out of concern for a looming transportation funding crisis. The group worked quickly to educate Ohio policy makers about the magnitude of the problem urging them to focus on the state's transportation funding structure and enact solutions that would provide a long-term, smart investment in Ohio's transportation future. The increased funding provided by enactment of HB 62, the FY 2021-22 transportation budget, will allow ODOT, and local governments to repair, maintain, and improve Ohio's surface transportation infrastructure, making Ohio's roads and bridges safer and more efficient for all motorists.

FOR Ohio Coalition members also recognize that a strong transportation future requires safe, effective, and efficient transportation for all Ohioans. State and local transportation officials have a responsibility to ensure roads are safe and operational. But safety on Ohio roads is more than just road conditions. Distracted driving, a problem that has grown at an alarming rate with the increase use in smart phones, claims the lives of more than 3,000 people nationwide each year. In 2017, Ohio alone recorded about 14,000 distracted driving crashes in which 58 people were killed, 493 were seriously injured and over 7,000 injured statewide.

To combat the dangers of distracted driving, the FOR Ohio Coalition is supporting SB 285. The Coalition has grown to more than 80 members with the shared focus of protecting and promoting Ohio's vast road and bridge network. Our membership includes local government, law enforcement, insurance, safety, and other related interest groups and organizations.

On behalf of OCA and FOR Ohio, thank you again you for the opportunity to express support for SB 285.