

September 23, 2021

The Honorable Jeff LaRe
Ohio House of Representatives
77 S. High St., 13th Fl
Columbus, OH 43215

Re: HB 283 (Abrams, Lampton) Distracted Driving

Chairman LaRe,

In June 2018, the day before Father's Day, my husband, John Fullenkamp, an engineer and farmer in Shelby County, was killed. It was a bright, cloudless Saturday afternoon, and he was working in the fields. He needed to move the tractor and equipment to a field less than a mile down the road, a trip he had taken countless times before. He was in an open-cab tractor and obeying all laws when a Cadillac Escalade hit him from behind. The driver, a 54-year-old woman, was using her phone to shop online at JC Penny's while driving. John was ejected from the tractor as it rolled off the road. He wasn't instantly killed. He had last words, felt pain, and knew the world he was leaving behind.

A few miles away, I was at home, unable to walk from major foot surgery the day prior, with our four children, aged 3, 6, 9, and 8 months. Our lives have simply never been the same. I see our kids growing up without the father they all adored, the husband that I loved with all my heart, and the provider for our home. Every milestone that passes is and will be a reminder of our loss - the first day of school, birthdays, graduations, weddings, big moments, and small moments.

The investigation that ensued after John was killed was telling. Using cell phone history, black box data, and crash scene reconstructions, it was determined that the driver had a full 16 seconds to look up from her phone to see John and avoid the crash. Sixteen seconds may not sound like a lot, but that window of time is what I find myself begging God to get back. Sixteen seconds of distraction at a high rate of speed results in a lot of blindly covered road.

The criminal sentencing was held in June 2019. The driver was given a 90-day jail sentence and received work privileges after 33 days. Her attorney was successful in obtaining driving privileges from 8:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday - Sunday that allowed for special driving privileges for shopping, and other non-essential trips. In my grief, I have cycled through many emotions, including anger. It is hard to know how John's death - murder - has been unjustly manipulated.

To move past this, I made the commitment to John to start a crusade against distracted driving. My organization, In the Blink of a Fly, has 11,000 community followers, including the hundreds of students that I have spoken to at school assemblies. My message to them is what I implore to you today - there are consequences for irresponsibility. Real lives can be taken. Children can lose fathers, wives their husbands, mothers their sons.

I ask you to support HB 283, which will protect lives and take a CLEAR stand against distracted driving in the State of Ohio. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Leah Fullenkamp