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BOARD CERTIFIED IN CLINICAL NEUROPSYCHOLOGY

Support for H.B. 74

February 15, 2021

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Dear Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chairman Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley,  
and members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is Dr. Tom Sullivan. I am presenting testimony in support of H.B. 74.

I completed a doctoral degree at the University of Cincinnati, an internship at the Yale University School of Medicine, and a fellowship in neuropsychology at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. I have worked with brain injured people for almost 30 years.

I have been on the staff at Cincinnati Children's Hospital since 1993 and have a private practice focused on brain injury assessment and treatment. I have provided concussion management services to the Cincinnati Bengals (or National Football League) since 1998. I have also completed about 1,500 brain injury evaluations at the behest of the courts, and have provided care to thousands of other brain-injured children and adults. I am board certified in my field.

As a clinician who has provided evaluations and treatment to children and adults with brain injuries in Ohio for the past 25+ years, I have witnessed the trends impacting drivers. At the outset of my career, it was relatively common to treat those injured by drunk drivers. Thankfully, after many years of zealous attention by legislatures, police officers, and advocacy groups, injuries caused by drunk drivers have become much less common.

As there were virtually no cell phones when I began my career, it was very uncommon to see someone whose brain injury had been caused by a distracted driver. Such injuries increased somewhat when people began to use cell phones in their cars.

Unfortunately, the rate of injuries caused by distracted drivers has clearly skyrocketed since the introduction of 'smart phones' in 2007. Since that time, I have treated an ever-increasing number of children and adults who have been grievously injured by distracted drivers. I have treated brain-injured children whose entire families have been killed in accidents caused by drivers who never saw the vehicles they hit. In addition, I have treated children and adults who have been traumatized by seeing others killed and maimed by distracted drivers.

Many of these accidents have occurred when drivers stop in traffic or at red lights, only to be struck from behind by distracted drivers who never look up from their phones, never apply their brakes, and strike stopped cars at highway speeds.

As someone passionately concerned about distracted driving, I typically watch other drivers when I am a passenger in a car. I consistently note that about 5-10% of drivers on the road are distracted by looking at their phones.

Unfortunately, it is my belief that large numbers of Ohioans will continue to be killed, maimed, and traumatized by distracted drivers unless the legislature takes leadership in addressing this situation. I urge the Legislature to treat distracted driving with the same urgency previously applied to drunk driving and to pass House Bill 74. My hope is that this change to the law, combined with active enforcement and education of the driving public, will save many lives.

Opponents of this bill are likely to criticize it as an unnecessary limitation of their rights. However, the rights of one citizen are appropriately restricted when they infringe on another citizen's right to survive. Passing this law will help to increase the safety of drivers and pedestrians who use Ohio's roads and sidewalks. This bill will not deny the rights of any Ohioans: anyone who needs to immediately view a critically important cat video can pull to the side of the road and do so. It is appropriate for the Legislature to require that people driving on Ohio's roads pay attention to what they are doing.

I would be happy to speak to any legislators about my concerns regarding distracted driving, and to answer any questions you have.

Thank you for your work in keeping Ohioans safe on the roads.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'T. Sullivan, Ph.D.', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Thomas Sullivan, Ph.D., ABPP-CN  
Board Certified in Clinical Neuropsychology