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Sponsor Testimony
Senate Bill 146
Senate Criminal Justice Committee
April 22, 2015

Chairman Eklund, Vice Chair Obhof, Ranking Minority Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Criminal Justice Committee. Thank you for giving Senator Seitz and me the opportunity to present to you Senate Bill 146.

As you may remember, last year I sponsored legislation with the help of 10TV sports anchor Dom Tiberi to establish a “Safe Driving Awareness” month. This year, I am continuing my push to promote safe driving. I, along with my colleague Bill Seitz, are continuing our efforts to keep our roadways safe by introducing Senate Bill 146 which is aimed at targeting distracted driving.

Senate Bill 146 would create an enhanced penalty for “distracted driving” that can only come into play when a driver is pulled over for another moving violation, which is currently a minor misdemeanor offense under Ohio law. Additionally, a law enforcement officer would only be able to issue a citation for “distracted driving” if they witness the offense at the same time as another moving violation, such as running a stop sign or red light. I have already been asked by

several individuals “does this mean they can be pulled over for using a blue tooth device or eating a hamburger as they are driving into Columbus down Interstate 71?” **No** you cannot. My answer to these fact patterns are only if you are speeding, hit a stopped vehicle or plow through an intersection or any other moving violation can you be charged with distracted driving if it is found that you were doing an unrelated to driving activity at the time of the offense. Senate Bill 146 only adds an enhanced penalty for distracted driving. You cannot simply be ticketed for eating while driving if you are not committing any other traffic offense.

The legislation would require that the person cited for distracted driving pay a fine of one hundred dollars for each offense.

In today’s world, current technology has aided in the creation of a society that is constantly communicating, whether it be texting, emailing, searching directions, surfing the web or listening to music. The dangers of taking part in these activities while behind the wheel are a harsh reality on our roads. With all of these high tech devices and society wanting to be connected at all times, it’s so easy to get distracted when behind the wheel.

Automobile accidents in Ohio are the No. 1 killer for those ages 8 to 24. Statistics show that someone is killed in an auto accident every 7.8 hours in Ohio and every 16 minutes nationwide. 11 percent of all drivers under the age of 20 involved in fatal crashes were reported as distracted at the time of the crash.

The National Highway Safety Administration reports that 3,154 people were killed and an estimated 424,000 people were injured in motor vehicle crashes involving distracted driving. 10% of fatal crashes and 18% of injury crashes in 2013 were reported as distraction-affected crashes.¹

To be clear, my legislative goal is to encourage Ohio drivers to be cautious when driving and to think of their safety before anything else. No text message or phone call is worth losing your life or harming someone else. A bad decision in a split second can impact you or your family for the rest of your life or others. There is no 'reset' button to hit to change the outcome.

Distracted driving is extremely dangerous and unfortunately all too common. I read about countless incidents each year in which a fatal accident was the result of distracted driving. It is my hope that this legislation will encourage drivers to remain focused on the road and help save lives.

Chairman Eklund and members of the Senate Criminal Justice committee, thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 146. I ask for your favorable support of this legislation. After Senator Seitz has presented his comments on this legislation, we would welcome any questions that you may have.

¹ NCSL **Traffic Safety Trends State Legislative Action 2014** By Anne Teigen, Douglas Shinkle and Amanda Essex February 2015