

Senate Bill 146
Senate Criminal Justice Committee
John Cooper
Proponent Testimony
June 3, 2015

Chairman Eklund, Vice Chair Obhof, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Ohio Senate Criminal Justice Committee ... my name is John Cooper and I am here today to offer support for Senate Bill 146, Senator Hughes' legislative proposal that if enacted, would establish an enhanced penalty for committing a moving violation while distracted.

As a father and grandfather, I take the safety of Ohio's roadways very seriously. Many times as I have traveled throughout this great state, I am amazed at what other drivers are doing. I cannot tell you how many drivers I have seen eating meals, applying makeup, talking on the phone and swerving in and out of their proper travel lanes.

As a former head coach of the Ohio State University football team, I am fully aware of the youth invincibility mantra—"nothing bad is every going to happen to me so I can multi-task as I drive." However, this is not always true. I bet that as you comb through the newspapers from each of your respective legislative districts, you will see an obituary for an individual that is younger than 25. Some of these deaths are not always the result of an automobile accident but unfortunately many of them are in Ohio and across the United States.

When I heard about Senate Bill 146, I was very pleased to see a focus on addressing the problem of distracted driving for all drivers on Ohio's roadways. 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 feel that as a result of this legislative proposal, we are taking the right steps to begin addressing the dangerous problem of distracted driving in Ohio.

I applaud Senators Jim Hughes and Bill Seitz for introducing this legislation. I think this is a win-win situation for Ohioans as we tackle distracted driving on our roadways. I minored in Drivers Education in college and in comparison to society back then, 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. No family should ever have to bury their children due to their lack of driving experience and training or due to the recklessness of a distracted driver.

Chairman Eklund and members of the Senate Criminal Justice committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on Senate Bill 146. I am happy to answer any questions that the committee may have.