



## Proponent Testimony in Support of HB 283 House Criminal Justice Committee Colonel Richard S. Fambro

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Chairman LaRe, Vice-Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 283 which would strengthen Ohio's distracted driving laws.

I have served with the Ohio State Highway Patrol for more than 30 years and have personally witnessed, on countless occasions, the detrimental effects of distracted driving. We know every time someone takes their focus off the road - even for just a few seconds - they put their life and the lives of others in danger. Law enforcement officers see the deadly consequences of distracted driving on a daily basis, and the tragedy left in its wake. More often than not, these distractions involve the use of an electronic device.

I would now like to draw your attention to the monitors as I share a distracted driving incident that occurred in our state.

A video posted on the Patrol's Northeast Ohio twitter account shows a vehicle on a divided roadway, dangerously traveling outside its lane multiple times. As the trooper was attempting to conduct a traffic stop, the driver drove off the right side of the roadway and struck a guardrail. He was so startled by what occurred, he immediately jumped out of the vehicle in astonishment from the incident.

### **PLAY VIDEO**

Fortunately, this incident did not lead to a tragic outcome. I can tell you from personal experience, notifying someone that their loved one is not coming home is never easy. We, as troopers, take it to heart... our job every day is to ensure that motorists make it home to their families, and we make it home to ours.

Just last year, according to provisional data, Ohio lost 1,235 people in traffic crashes because of choices such as not wearing a seatbelt, distracted driving, speeding and driving impaired. In fact, over the last five years, Ohio has averaged more than three traffic fatalities per day and our troopers often see the tragedy left in its wake.

If you turn your attention again to the monitors, what you are seeing is from another social media post on our Central Ohio twitter account showing a vehicle traveling on a two lane road, dangerously traveling outside its lane of travel. As the trooper attempted to conduct a traffic stop, the motorist ran off the right side of the roadway and struck a utility pole that immediately came crashing down on the vehicle. Fortunately, the trooper ran to the aid of the motorist who was trapped inside, with live power lines on top of the vehicle. Our trooper was able to give the driver clear direction to stay in the vehicle because of the voltage, which possibly saved her life.

**PLAY VIDEO**

What I have shown you today are just two of numerous examples where specific legislative action toward enhancing distracted driving penalties in Ohio could be crucial and lifesaving. To that point, in the last example I gave you, the driver stated she was trying to use the GPS on her phone. This new legislation would improve Ohio's texting law and would, for example, require motorists to use voice commands or single-touch activation to make calls, text, use GPS or listen to music on mobile devices – this crash clearly illustrates the impact this law could have on safety in Ohio.

Distracted driving has proven in recent years to be a growing problem, with a large number of crashes attributed to the dangerous practice. Since 2016, there have been over 66,000 crashes in Ohio attributed to distracted driving, with 195 of them being fatal.

In the near future, we will be unveiling a new online dashboard devoted to distracted driving enforcement and education. The Distracted Driving Dashboard is a detailed view of crashes and violations across Ohio, and the important work that troopers around the state are doing to reduce the impact of this dangerous crime.

The new Distracted Driving Dashboard is a part of the Ohio Statistics and Analytics for Traffic Safety, known as OSTATS, which is a series of internal and public-facing dashboards dedicated to exploration, analysis, and visualization of crash data across Ohio. Users of the public-facing Distracted Driving Dashboard will have the ability to filter data, find specific county and route statistics and get a front seat view of what our troopers do every day to stop distracted driving. In addition, an interactive map shows videos of troopers enforcing violations and where distracted driving corridors are located in Ohio.

Chairman LaRe, I will let you know when that dashboard is live so you can share the link with members of this committee.

Distracted driving is unsafe and irresponsible, and in a split second, the consequences can be devastating. That's why it's so important for law enforcement officers to be able to take immediate action when they observe a distracted driver. Primary enforcement of hands-free distracted driving laws has been shown to decrease fatality rates in states that have implemented this type of legislation. This is precisely why HB 283 is needed in Ohio. The bill bans dangerous and deadly behavior and gives law enforcement the tools to deter and enforce its provisions.

Chairman LaRe and members of the committee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and encourage you to support HB 283 which will undoubtedly help change driving behavior, saving countless lives on Ohio's roadways.

I am more than happy to entertain any questions from the committee.