



House Bill 283
Testimony of Chris Runyan
President, Ohio Contractors Association and Chair of the FOR Ohio Coalition
House Criminal Justice Committee
September 23, 2021

Chairman LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, my name is Chris Runyan, and I am the President of the Ohio Contractors Association (OCA). I also serve as the Chair of the Fix Our Roads Ohio (FOR Ohio) Coalition. Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony for House Bill 283 on behalf of OCA and FOR Ohio.

I want to begin my remarks in my role as President of OCA. For those of you that might not know, OCA is the trade association representing Ohio's heavy/highway construction industry and is comprised of more than 500 members representing all aspects of the design, construction, and maintenance of Ohio's infrastructure system.

For the more than 115,000 individuals employed in the heavy/highway construction industry, enhancing Ohio's distracted driving law is an important tool in addressing work zone safety. The men and women you see working along Ohio's roadways are our members. These hardworking and highly skilled individuals put their lives on the line every day to build and maintain Ohio's vast infrastructure network. This work is inherently dangerous and becomes even more dangerous when motorists travel through a work zone paying more attention to their hand-held cellular device than to their driving.

While distractions create dangerous situations under normal driving conditions, the prospect of a crash occurring when driving distracted is amplified in a work zone. A driver's situational awareness should be heightened not reduced because of the proximity of workers, merging construction traffic, narrowed lanes and shoulders, speed reductions, irregular traffic patterns, and uneven surface conditions often found in work zones. Being distracted magnifies these hazards and threatens the lives of motorists and the workers. Our goal must be to get every employee home to their families each night.

In 2019 there were 6,574 work zone crashes in Ohio, an all-time record. That number represents a 40 percent increase from 2018. Of those 6,574 crashes, 1,121 involved injuries with 129 being serious injuries resulting in 16 deaths. And tragically two construction workers lost their lives. In 2020, despite traffic being reduced by nearly 50 percent at times during the pandemic, work zone fatalities increased to 21 deaths. I'm also sad to report three

construction workers were killed in 2020. The outlook for 2021 is also discouraging. So far there have been 23 fatalities in work zone crashes and one construction worker has been killed.

We are grateful to Representatives Abrams and Lampton for recognizing the need to protect and promote the safety of highway workers by including a provision in HB 283 that would double fines for distracted driving offenses occurring in a work zone. Just like current law that allows fines for speeding and other traffic infractions to be doubled, these penalties would only occur when workers are present.

Efforts to address distracted driving and make Ohio's roadways safer are appreciated and encouraged by OCA. Doing so will make Ohio roadways safer and help protect the lives of the men and women that have chosen a career in highway construction. On their behalf, I encourage your support for HB 283.

Shifting to my role as Chair of the FOR Ohio Coalition, I also encourage your support HB 235. FOR Ohio, a diverse group of Ohioans with a shared interest in the future of our state's economy and lifestyle, came together in 2018 out of concern for a looming transportation funding crisis. FOR Ohio Coalition members also recognize that a strong transportation future requires safe, effective, and efficient transportation for all Ohioans. State and local transportation officials have a responsibility to ensure roads are safe and operational. But safety on Ohio roads is more than just road conditions. Fatalities in Ohio have risen six of the past seven years, and overall crashed in Ohio remain persistently high at a time when vehicles themselves are getting safer. In 2020, travel was down overall about 17 percent, yet traffic deaths rose 7 percent compared to 2019. Ohio ended 2020 with 1,237 traffic deaths – 82 more than the 1,115 reported in 2019.

To combat the dangers of distracted driving, the FOR Ohio Coalition is supporting HB 283. The Coalition has grown to more than 90 members with the shared focus of protecting and promoting Ohio's vast road and bridge network. Our membership includes local government, law enforcement, insurance, safety, healthcare, labor groups and other related interest groups and organizations.

To gauge public sentiment on the issue of distracted driving, the FOR Ohio Coalition commissioned a public opinion poll. A summary document of the poll results is attached to my testimony. As you will see:

- Three-quarters of Ohio drivers say that using a hand-held cell phone is more dangerous or just as dangerous as driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- By a two-to-one margin, distracted driving is THE major worry for Ohio drivers.
- 78% of the respondents would support a new law addressing the issue of distracted driving. And support for the new law cuts across age groups, media markets, political ideology, as well as ethnicity.
- Nearly 90 percent of the respondents say they would be willing to obey the new law.
- A vast majority (61%) also believes distracted driving crashes would decrease if this new law was passed and enforced.

I encourage you to review the full poll results which can be found on the FOR Ohio website at www.FixOurRoadsOhio.com and click on the “Distracted Driving” tab.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on behalf of OCA and FOR Ohio and we encourage your support for HB 283. I’m happy to answer any questions you may have.