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Proponent Testimony for HB 74 Hands-Free Legislation

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley, and members of the Ohio House Finance Committee; I am Kimberly Schwind, Senior Manager, Public Affairs at AAA Ohio Auto Club and I am submitting proponent testimony for HB 74 on behalf of the Ohio Conference of AAA Clubs. The Ohio Conference is composed of the five AAA Clubs in Ohio, and represents approximately 3 million Ohioans, all constituents of yours.

Distracted driving and the use of handheld devices while driving is an ongoing problem. It's nearly impossible to drive anywhere without seeing someone texting or even watching a video while they drive. This dangerous traffic safety behavior kills an average of nine people and injures 1,000 each day, according to data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Last year in Ohio alone, over 14,000 distracted driving crashes occurred leading to 58 deaths and over 7,000 injuries statewide. However, we know these numbers are vastly underrepresented and that the problem is far greater than this.

Research has shown that the combination of visual, cognitive, and physical distractions involved in manipulating a handheld electronic device while driving makes it an inherently dangerous activity. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety (AAAFTS) has conducted numerous studies regarding distracted driving that demonstrate:

- Drivers interacting with cell phones to perform tasks like texting or surfing the Internet are two-to-eight times more likely to be involved in a crash.
- Taking your eyes off the road for just two seconds doubles your chances of being involved in a crash.
- 59% of all teen crashes involve some form of driver inattention, and 12% of teen crashes involve cell phone use.

The Ohio Conference of AAA Clubs commends Governor DeWine for bringing such an important piece of legislation forward that will close loopholes in the current law and save lives.

Currently, 48 states and D.C. ban texting while driving for all drivers. Of those states 46 have primary enforcement bans. Only Nebraska and Ohio have secondary bans on texting while driving. Other states that began with secondary laws upgraded them after experiencing first-hand the limitations of this approach. In 2020, South Dakota upgraded their law to primary and in 2019, Florida upgraded their law.

There is widespread consensus that Ohio's secondary enforcement ban on reading, writing, or sending text-based communication while driving, has done little to change driver behavior. Upgrading the law to primary would provide law enforcement the tools they need to take action when they observe drivers engaged in this dangerous and preventable driving behavior.



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Public support for this change is also very strong. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found nearly all drivers view reading (95.9%) or typing (96.7%) a text or email on a hand-held cellphone while driving to be very or extremely dangerous and the majority of drivers (75%) support laws restricting distracted driving.

While we support this legislation, as it will modernize Ohio's distracted driving law and provide law enforcement the tools they need to make our roads safer, as the leading advocate for traffic safety and the motoring public, AAA cautions that hands-free isn't risk free. AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety research clearly shows that drivers who use voice-based technology are still cognitively distracted. When using this technology, your hands are on the wheel and eyes on the road, but your mind may not be on the task of driving.

AAA urges drivers to minimize all distractions while behind the wheel and focus on the task of driving. Drivers should get in the habit of turning off their cell phone or storing it away each time you get behind the wheel. If drivers must make a call or text someone, they should look for a safe place to pull off the road before interacting with the phone.

Thank you for your consideration of this important piece of legislation and we urge your support of this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kimberly Schwind'.

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