



February 24, 2021

The Honorable Scott Oelslager  
Ohio House of Representatives  
77 S. High St., 13th Floor  
Columbus, OH 43215

**Re: HB 74 (Oelslager, S.)** Transportation Budget

Dear Chairman Oelslager,

I am writing to ask you to support passage of HB 74, the state biennial transportation budget. Specifically, I'd ask for your support of the Hands-Free Ohio provision contained within the transportation budget, which revises Ohio's law relative to distracted driving.

I am a research faculty member at Ohio State University and was a member of the Ohio Distracted Driving Task Force. Based on my own review of the literature as well as that done by my fellow Task Force members, I believe that passage of HB 74 will make Ohio roads safer.

We know that distracted driving poses a serious risk to Ohio roads and that other states that have enacted stricter limits on distracted driving have seen a reduction in driver fatalities.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, high visibility enforcement of laws, along with graduated driver licensing for beginners are the best ways to prevent driver distraction. Ohio already has graduated licensing for beginners, but our officers are limited in their ability to engage in high visibility enforcement due to the current laws.

In Ohio, distracted driving is a secondary offense in adults. In practice, this means that law enforcement officers must follow a distracted driver until they commit another violation. Changing distracted driving to a primary offense would allow officers the discretion to pull over distracted drivers right away, without having to wait for them to put others at risk.

Officers I have surveyed are supportive of a change from secondary to primary enforcement of distracted driving. In 2019, I surveyed over 1,500 law enforcement officers across Ohio on behalf of the Department of Transportation. The officers we surveyed came from the State Highway Patrol, Sheriff's offices, and municipal police departments.

These officers were concerned about current distracted driving laws and supportive of a change from enforcing distracted driving as a secondary offense to a primary offense.

1. 80% of officers cited “distracted driving is a secondary offense for adults” as an obstacle to enforcing current laws.
2. 94% of officers supported primary enforcement of distracted driving in adults.

As one officer put it, “A primary violation law would allow an officer to stop and cite when they see someone looking down into their lap at a cellphone instead of waiting to see if that action also brings about a dangerous event that might cause someone their life.”

Again, thank you for your consideration to vote YES on HB 74 and Hands-Free Ohio. This legislation will save lives by keeping all eyes on the road and both hands on the wheel.

Sincerely,



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Cc: Ohio House of Representatives Finance Committee