



**Ohio Association of Regional Councils (OARC)
House Finance Committee
Proponent Testimony on House Bill 74
February 24, 2021**

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley and members of the House Finance Committee: thank you for allowing OARC to submit written testimony in support of the “Hands Free Ohio” provisions in HB 74, the state’s transportation budget. OARC is pleased to join its FOROhio coalition colleagues in support of this important safety initiative, which would amend distracted driving laws to further deter people from engaging in this dangerous behavior.

The Ohio Association of Regional Councils (OARC) represents the state’s 24 councils of governments and regional planning commissions that provide transportation, economic development, air quality and water quality planning and delivery of services for regional areas across the state. As part of our transportation work, OARC members conduct traffic monitoring and vehicle crash analyses to identify ways to improve safety for vehicles of all modes on the road.

Looking at the data, it is clear that distracted driving presents one of the biggest and ever-increasing safety risks to Ohioans in transit today. Since 2013, over 305 people have been killed, over 47,000 injured and over 91,000 crashes have occurred due to distracted driving in Ohio. And, unfortunately, these statistics likely don’t represent the whole picture, given it is often hard to confirm a driver was distracted after the fact. This behavior is easily preventable, which makes these casualties even more discouraging.

Governor DeWine’s Distracted Driving Advisory Council concluded that current laws do not do enough to deter distracted driving behavior. By strengthening these laws and making the use of an electronic wireless communications device while driving a primary offense, HB 74 helps to bolster the disincentive to drive distracted and provides law enforcement with the tools they need to enforce these safety standards.

Our support noted, OARC believes it would be remiss not to acknowledge the way a hands-free law might disproportionately impact those who cannot afford vehicles with built-in communication systems. In light of this, we would ask that the state consider data collection on violations or a reporting mechanism during implementation that might identify whether the law results in enforcement that applies to certain demographics more than others.

OARC appreciates the opportunity to express its support for language in the transportation budget making driving distracted a primary offense. We urge committee members to support this important safety effort.