

## **HANDS FREE OHIO IN HB 74 PROPONENT TESTIMONY 2-24-21**

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chairman Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley, and House Finance Committee, my name is Keith Conner. I have been a Columbus police officer for 21 years. I was a member of the ODOT Distracted Driving Task Force. Gov. DeWine used recommendations from that task force to make clear what he sees as necessary for better traffic safety.

I want to add my support for making distracted driving a primary offense statewide.

Columbus and some other cities created their own distracted driving laws with primary enforcement. This allows me and my colleagues to stop drivers *before* they cause harm. Preventing harm is always better than punishing it after the fact.

Columbus enacted its texting ordinance in 2010. A few years ago, I had two encounters with texting drivers. The first was with a woman that was texting (with her head down) on N. High St. and Cooke Rd., at approximately 35 miles an hour. If I had not been observant, she would have struck my patrol vehicle head on.

The second incident happened on the same day. A 81 year old man was “texting a friend” and ran my patrol vehicle off the road and I was inches away from striking a COTA bus stop.

This convinced me more than ever that these drivers must be stopped. Please don't wait until you've had a near miss—or worse—with a distracted driver before using your authority to restrict this behavior.

Since June of 2017 I have issued 932 texting citations and given over 5000 verbal warnings. These numbers lead the most stops and citations of any other law enforcement officer in the State of Ohio (and possibly the Nation). I always give a ticket instead of a warning when there are children in the vehicle. Adults are supposed to protect, not endanger, children.

This much prevention would not be possible under the current state law, which allows only secondary enforcement. I can see drivers bobbing their heads up and down, drifting out of their lane, or holding their phone. I can't tell by looking whether a driver is 17 or 18. The current state law is very difficult to enforce. The provisions in this bill are very enforceable.

Now that my patrol area knows I am on the lookout and will make the traffic stops, I am seeing fewer drivers texting. A primary enforcement law is not only enforceable, it will be effective.

Thank you for allowing me to give my perspective. I would be happy to answer any questions.