



State Representative Cindy Abrams

District 29

HB 283 – Sponsor Testimony

Senate Judiciary Committee

December 6, 2022

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Thomas and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for giving Representative Lampton and I the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 283. This bill will prohibit an individual from looking at their electronic wireless communications device, or EWCD, and will make distracted driving a primary offense.

Rep. Lampton and I know the Senate has seen many iterations of a distracted driving bill in the past, however we want to assure you that extensive work was done on this bill in the House, leading to unanimous passage out of Committee and strong bi-partisan support off the House Floor. The current version of HB 283 contains the following common-sense exemptions:

- Holding the phone to your ear to make a phone call;
- Using an EWCD in emergency situations;
- Using an EWCD in the course one's duties while operating a public safety vehicle;
- When the car is in a stationary position at a red light;
- When the car is parked on a road or highway due to an emergency or road closure;
- When making a single tap or swipe;
- Using a mobile data terminal while driving a commercial truck;
- Using an EWCD while operating a utility service vehicle in certain emergency situations;
- And the use of two-way radio transmitters and receivers for the Amateur Radio Service.

HB 283 has come a long way and we believe the current version is ready to be passed.

We have had extensive conversations with the Fix Our Roads (FOR) Ohio Coalition, a group of stakeholders united in supporting efforts to secure critical funding for Ohio's transportation infrastructure as well as advocating for laws that include safe driving habits for all motorists sharing Ohio's roads and highways. In a recent poll conducted by the coalition, the number one concern for Ohio drivers is distracted driving. This is consistent regardless of age, political ideology or region of the state. Additionally, 71% of Ohio's drivers disagree with the notion that distracted driving does not merit a new law. This spans across party lines.

The goal of this bill is not to punish people, it is about changing behavior. Accompanying this bill will be a massive, statewide education campaign, ensuring everyone is aware of Ohio's distracted driving laws. In the first six months following the bill's effective date, any violations will receive a warning. Likewise, for the first violation that results in a ticket, that person may take an online or in-person distracted driving course to waive the two points that would be added to their license.

In 2019, the Ohio Distracted Driving Task Force distributed a report that addresses distracted driving. The task force found that states with primary, hands-free laws have seen a significant reduction in traffic deaths. In 2018, Georgia became the 16th state to pass a primary hands-free law with stronger penalties. From July 1 through September 30, 2018, Georgia saw a 14% reduction in total traffic deaths.

Since this report in 2019, there have been noticeable discounts in distracted driving crashes in other states that have more recently passed hands-free legislation. In July 2020, Indiana began enforcing its hands-free law. According to the Indiana Criminal Justice Institute, vehicle collisions with distracted driving as a factor dropped from 10,132 in 2019 to a 10-year low of 8,761 in 2020. This information was reported and submitted by all law enforcement agencies throughout the state.

All of these statistics point to a need for this legislation here in Ohio and serve as evidence that distracted driving laws really do save lives.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 283.