

Senate Transportation Committee

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Mr. Jason Wetzel, General Motors

Written Only Proponent Testimony - SB459

Good morning Chair Petersen and members of the Senate Transportation Committee. My name is Jason Wetzel, government relations for General Motors. GM strongly supports SB459.

No matter what the cause, distracted driving poses a risk for all motorists and passengers on our nation's highways. NHSTA estimates that distractions led to more than 3,100 fatal accidents in 2017, with the actual number estimated to be much higher and increasing each year. While we all have likely witnessed other motorists driving distracted – whether from programming a GPS, or eating a sandwich, or just about everything else one can imagine – SB459 addresses the most prevalent cause of distracted driving.

According to information compiled by NSCL from NHSTA, AAA, and the CTIA Wireless Association, more than 303 million Americans have cell phones. Ninety-six percent own a mobile phone while 81 percent own a smart phone. The rapid adoption of smartphone tech has impacted many aspects of our lives. Our ability to access the internet, social media and videos while “on the go” present an increasing danger for motorists, passengers and pedestrians across the country and here in Kansas. It is estimated that at any given time during daylight hours, more than 800,000 vehicles are being driven by someone using a handheld device. This is a conservative estimate and the number is likely much higher.

More than a decade of research indicates that using mobile or smartphone while driving causes the brain to shift between two tasks, which slows reaction time and narrows our field of vision. Distracted drivers, while engaged in the behavior, exhibit similar behaviors to drunk drivers including slow reaction times, erratic speeds, weaving and sudden braking.

Hands-free use of devices while driving does not mean risk free, but it starts to break the cycle. It does so by prohibiting drivers from frequently touching electronic devices while driving. It also communicates to drivers that device use is not safe while driving in Kansas. SB459 will help change behaviors in Kansas that make our roads safer for all its citizens.

For GM, reducing and eliminating distracted driving aligns with our vision of zero crashes, zero emissions and zero congestion. Safety is our top priority and our company policies encourage and enforce this behavior. For example, we are prohibited from using a handheld device while driving and employees and contractors also have restrictions on using devices while walking at any of our facilities. The reason is simple: we know distractions lead to accidents.

SB459 will help reduce distracted driving in Kansas, which in turn will reduce crashes and save lives. Chair Petersen, we applaud your leadership on this issue and encourage members of the committee to support the bill.