

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE**

**REGARDING SENATE BILL 332
RELATING TO HANDS FREE DRIVING**

January 25, 2022

Mr. Chairman and Committee Members:

The Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) is providing written testimony in support of Senate Bill 332, hands free use of a mobile phone while operating a motor vehicle. This proposed legislation prohibits the use of mobile phone while operating a motor vehicle in a school zone, road construction zone or by individual under the age of 18. The proposed legislation creates a new traffic infraction which carries a fine of \$60.

Drivers under the age of 18 are overrepresented in motor vehicle crashes. Lack of experience behind the wheel is the primary reason this age group is involved in crashes. Legislation that strives to remove distractions while driving should lead to fewer crashes as this vulnerable age group gains experience behind the wheel.

Eliminating the use of a hand-held mobile phones should increase safety in school and road construction zones. Schools zones are unique in that children and motor vehicles are in very close proximity and require motor vehicle operators to have their full and undivided attention. Road construction zones also bring motor vehicles and workers closer together. Many road construction zones have reduced lane widths, higher speeds, detours and therefore require a driver to be fully focused on the task of driving.

The act of driving requires your full attention. Any action that takes your hands off the wheel, eyes off the road and interrupts your train of thought is distracted driving and can create an unsafe driving environment for themselves and anyone else on the road. A driver engaging in talking on the phone will exhibit similar traits to an impaired driver, trouble maintaining their lane, inconsistent speed and slow to react at intersections when authorized to proceed.

According to KDOT crash statistics, from 2015 to 2020, 73 persons have lost their lives to distracted driving. Included in that number are 39 people that have lost their lives due to mobile phone use. Annually, the state averages about 15,000 distracted or inattentive driving crashes. This translates to about 25 percent of all crashes listing distracted or inattentive driving as a contributing circumstance.

Annually KDOT conducts an observational survey targeting seat belt use. The 2020 survey, conducted in 26 counties across the state, also captures distracted driving behaviors. The study shows about seven-and one-half percent of drivers are distracted behind the wheel. Two percent of drivers are texting, three

percent are engaged in talking on their phone and the remaining two and half percent are engaged in other distractions behind the wheel. The KDOT study mirrors national data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. If you think about the number of drivers you interact with every day, this data shows about seven- and one-half percent of drivers are not fully focused on the task of driving.

If this bill is enacted as written, KDOT will engage a committee comprised of state partners and traffic safety advocates to develop, administer and distribute a wireless telecommunications device safety program.

Eliminating handheld phone use for drivers under the age of 18, drivers in work and road construction zones can create positive strides to reducing the number of deaths, injuries and crashes on Kansas roads. This type of legislation will also lead to improving the safety culture for all drivers in the state and work to protect some of our most vulnerable drivers, children and workers in the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 332.