

I, Dr. Paul Atchley, Professor of Psychology at the University of Kansas, would like to offer testimony in support of HB 2219 which will improve the safety of Kansas citizens by helping to prevent distracted driving.

I have been conducting research and teaching about cognitive factors related to driving for over 20 years. I received my Ph.D. from the University of California, Riverside in 1996 and completed postdoctoral training at the Beckman Institute at the University of Illinois in 1998. I joined the Psychology Department at the University of Kansas in 1998. I have published numerous peer-reviewed articles and chapters on issues of vision and attention including their relationship to driving. I have also received awards for research, teaching and student advising, and am proud to have been commissioned as an officer in the U.S. Army Reserve in 1988.

Work from my laboratory has been highlighted by national and international press such as the BBC, NPR, Rock Center with Brian Williams, "Katie" with Katie Couric, and the New York Times. I am part of efforts at the state and national level to reduce distracted driving. I work with groups including the National Safety Council, LifeSavers, and FocusDriven to educate about the science of distracted driving. Examples of groups I have spoken to include the Oklahoma legislature, National Employers for Traffic Safety (a group of Fortune 500 companies interested in traffic safety for their employees), energy companies and many other employers, distracted driving and safety summits in Texas, Florida, Illinois and other states, insurance industry groups including the National Conference Of Insurance Legislators, judicial groups, and schools.

I would like to offer the following data and observations to help us understand the growing threat of distracted driving and how laws can be an effective tool to end this threat.

1) The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (1) lists crashes in which driver “a driver failed to look, or looked but did not see, when it was essential to safely complete a vehicle maneuver” (page 24) as the most common driver attributed cause of crashes.

2) Many of the crashes that would have been prevented if phone use was illegal and those laws were enforced do not get reported. The National Safety Council showed that over 50% of fatal crashes that were known to have been caused by a phone due to admission by the driver, subsequent examination of the phone records during civil trial, or evidence supplied by multiple witnesses were not listed in the Fatal Accident Reporting System database as involving a distracted driver.

3) The National Safety Council estimates that about one-quarter of all crashes in the United States are directly related to the use of phones while driving. (2)

4) Research on the effects of distraction by cellular phones on driver performance consistently indicates that these devices when used for making calls, either hand held or hands free, or to text, significantly increase driver distraction and impair driver performance by producing manual, visual and cognitive impairments. A selected set of example works supporting this from the hundreds of such works spanning four decades of research follows.

- a) Research examining the effects of engaging in a hands free conversation with someone not in the vehicle shows that the visual attention of younger, healthy drivers is reduced to the extent that their attention looks like that of a senior, impaired, driver. (3)
- b) Studies examining phone records following crashes (4, 5) show that evidence of a phone call in the minutes preceding a crash increases the likelihood of a crash by over 400%, regardless if the phone was used in a hand held or hands free manner.
- c) Simulator studies comparing drunk drivers to drivers using hands free cellular phones show that drunk drivers perform better. Distracted drivers brake more slowly and miss more safety critical events. (6)
- d) The mental workload of cellular conversations restricts the eye-movements necessary for adequate surveillance of the roadway. (7, 8)
- e) The brain of a driver processing a cellular conversation “draws mental

resources away from the driving and produces deterioration in driving performance..." (9, page 70).

- f) Cellular conversations are more mentally taxing than conversations with passengers. (10, 11)
- g) A review of cognitive distraction by cellular phones by the National Safety Council summarizes the effects: "Distracted drivers experience what researchers call inattention blindness, similar to that of tunnel vision. Drivers are looking out the windshield, but they do not process everything in the roadway environment that they must know to effectively monitor their surroundings, seek and identify potential hazards, and respond to unexpected situations." (12, page 2)

5) Public opinion strongly supports banning cellular phones while driving. A 2010 Quinnipiac University poll of 2424 U.S. voters found by a 63% – 34% margin, American voters support a federal ban on cell phone use while driving, even while using a "hands-free" device. Opinions have become even stronger against distracted driving over the last five years.

6) A large number of U.S. corporations ban the use of cellular phones by their employees. These include almost every energy company (Shell, Chevron, and others), almost all pharmaceutical companies (Abbott, AstraZenica, and others), and almost all transportation companies (CSX Intermodal, Schneider National and others).

7) Research by the National Safety Council with member companies has consistently found that productivity more often improves than goes down in companies that ban the use of phones. We have found in our laboratory that executives negotiating while driving show a 30% loss in negotiation performance.

8) Laws can be enforced. In enforcement studies funded by NHTSA, phone use and texting use declined by between 32% and 72% in cities that had bans and made efforts to enforce them.

Based upon these data alone I would urge the Kansas Legislature to improve laws to end distracted driving.

However, I would like to conclude with a more personal point. In my work I am

regularly in contact with parents who have lost children to distracted drivers. During the inevitable court cases that follow these deaths, when the call or the text that caused the death is examined, it is always the case that the message was not worth a human life. In every case, they are messages that could have easily waited for the end of the drive with no problem created and with the result of safety improved. Making laws to help drivers kick the distraction habit when they drive is the right thing to do.

## Supporting References

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[http://www.nsc.org/safety\\_road/Distracted\\_Driving/Pages/CognitiveDistraction.aspx](http://www.nsc.org/safety_road/Distracted_Driving/Pages/CognitiveDistraction.aspx)