

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON UTILITIES AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS**

**REGARDING HOUSE BILL 2219
RELATING TO HANDS FREE DRIVING**

February 10, 2015

Mr. Chairman and Committee Members:

The Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) is providing written testimony in support of House Bill 2219, pertaining to hands-free driving. This proposed legislation intends to clarify the current anti-texting provisions of K.S.A. 8-15,111, as well as require voice communications by wireless devices (such as cell phones) to be hands-free.

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. An increasing number of electronic distractions in vehicles, such as navigation systems, cell phones, smartphones, tablet devices, the ability to watch videos, and using CD or MP3 players, have led to more and more drivers that are operating vehicles while distracted. Two of the most prevalent forms of distracted driving are targeted by this legislation: texting and talking on a cell phone. Since 2009 the U.S. Department of Transportation has led the effort to stop texting and cell phone use behind the wheel. Texting and cell phone use have been banned for all commercial drivers, and states have been encouraged to raise public awareness about the dangers of these behaviors and adopt tough laws in an effort to reduce accidents and fatalities caused by texting and other types of distracted driving. Currently 44 states ban text messaging for drivers of all ages, and 14 states prohibit drivers of all ages from using handheld cell phones while driving.¹

Admittedly, teens and young adults are more likely to text and drive. A quarter of teens respond to a text message once or more every time they drive. Five seconds is the average time your eyes are off the road while texting. When travelling at 55 m.p.h, that is similar to driving blindfolded for the entire length of a football field. However, other tasks associated with cell phone use, such as reaching for a phone or dialing a number, increase the risk of getting into a crash by three times.

From 2009 to 2014 in Kansas, an average of 92 persons per year lost their lives due to distracted driving. That means almost one in four fatalities are attributed to distracted driving. During this same period, the state has averaged 15,000 distracted driving crashes. In other words, 25 percent of all crashes list distracted driving as a contributing circumstance.

Education plays an important role in reducing death and injury on Kansas roads. The proposed enhancements to the current statute, coupled with increased educational efforts targeted at the most at-

¹ <http://www.distraction.gov/get-the-facts/state-laws.html>.

risk groups, should promote the goal of KDOT, law enforcement agencies in this state, and other groups dedicated to traffic safety, to reduce the number of distracted driving accidents, and most importantly fatalities attributed to texting or using a cell phone. Simply put, under the proposed legislation, if you are using a phone while driving, whether you are texting or holding the phone to make a call, you will be subject to a ticket. The message is a simple one: Put down the phone and JUST DRIVE.