

Dwight D. Eisenhower State Office Building
700 S.W. Harrison Street
Topeka, KS 66603-3745

Julie L. Lorenz, Secretary
Brian D. Gower, P.E., Chief



Department of Transportation
Bureau of Transportation Safety & Technology

Phone: 785-296-3618
Fax: 785-291-3010
kdot#publicinfo@ks.gov
<http://www.ksdot.org>
Laura Kelly, Governor

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE**

**REGARDING SENATE BILL 25
RELATING TO HANDS FREE DRIVING**

January 27, 2021

Mr. Chairman and Committee Members:

I am Chris Bortz, Traffic Safety Program Manager for The Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT). I am here today to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 25, 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 and detours which require a driver to be fully focused on the task of driving. A driver engaging in talking on the phone will also exhibit similar traits to an impaired driver, trouble maintaining their lane, inconsistent speed and slow reaction times at intersections when authorized to proceed.

According to KDOT crash statistics, from 2014 to 2019, 75 persons lost their lives due to distracted driving. 34 of those people that 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. At a national level eight percent of fatal crashes, 15 percent of injury crashes, and 14 percent of all police-reported motor vehicle traffic crashes in 2018 were reported as distraction-affected crashes.

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 those drivers are not fully focused on the task of driving.

Eliminating hand-held phone use for drivers under the age of 18 and drivers in work and road construction zones can create positive strides to reduce the number of deaths, injuries and crashes on Kansas roads. KDOT defers to the expertise of our law enforcement partners as to enforcement of the proposed bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 25. I am happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.