

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE  
SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE**

**REGARDING SENATE BILL 459  
RELATING TO DISTRACTED DRIVING**

**March 11, 2020**

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 459 related to distracted driving. The proposed legislation repeals the current anti-texting statute K.S.A. 8-15, 111 and creates a distracted driving infraction. It also amends K.S.A. 8-2118 the uniform schedule of fines to include a distracted driving fine.

SB 459 creates a traffic infraction and associated fine for the use of a wireless telecommunications device without a hands-free accessory while operating a motor vehicle. The bill also instructs KDOT to approve a wireless telecommunications device use while driving safety program.

Safety is a top priority at KDOT and reducing crashes and fatalities on the transportation system is important to KDOT. This issue is best addressed through strict laws and penalties and the strong enforcement of those laws. Education through an approved safety program will also enhance strides to reducing the number of deaths, injuries and crashes on Kansas roads.

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. Reading or sending one text message while driving at 55 mph is like driving blindfolded for the entire length of a football field. A distracted driver will exhibit similar traits to an impaired driver.

According to KDOT crash statistics, from 2013 to 2018, 78 persons have lost their lives to distracted driving. Annually, Kansas averages about 15,000 distracted driving crashes. This translates to about 25 percent of all crashes with distracted driving as a contributing circumstance.

KDOT conducts an annual observational survey targeting seat belt use. This survey, conducted in 26 counties across the state, also captures distracted driving behaviors. The study shows about nine percent of drivers are distracted behind the wheel. Two percent of drivers are texting, four percent are engaged in talking on their phone and the remaining three percent are engaged in other distractions behind the wheel.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 459. I am happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.