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Michael J. Sauschuck
Commissioner

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Director

April 11, 2019

Joint Standing Committee on Transportation
Room 126, State House
Augusta, Maine 04330

RE: LD 165 *An Act to Prohibit the Use of Handheld Phones and Devices While Driving (as amended).*

Senator Diamond, Representative Mclean, and Members of the Transportation Committee:

The Bureau of Highway Safety and the Maine State Police wish to share some information and facts about distracted driving that you may find helpful.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates that distracted driving caused an estimated 3,450 deaths in 2016 and about 391,000 injuries in 2015. A recent survey by the Governors Highway Safety Association finds that almost every state, D.C., Puerto Rico, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands have laws prohibiting drivers from some form of distraction while driving.

A recent Status Report by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety states that cell phone manipulations are up 57 percent in 2018 over a prior survey done in 2014 in Virginia. They also state that manipulating a cell phone was a contributing factor in more than 800 crash deaths on U.S. roads during 2017.

To help determine what was happening in Maine, the Bureau of Highway Safety conducted its first observational study of cell phone use while driving in Maine in April of 2018. Eighty observation locations were selected with 5 to 9 sites each in 14 counties. 13,568 drivers were observed to determine hand-held use, manipulation, and ear device use (such as Bluetooth). Overall, 6.3 % of the Maine drivers observed were either using a hand-held phone to their ear (3.7%) or manipulating the device (i.e. texting, reading, or dialing (3.1%) and .7% were using an in-ear device. By comparison, a National study conducted in 2016 showed that 5.4% of the Nation was either talking or manipulating a phone.

Despite the sophistication and advancement of both vehicle and device technology, the use of portable devices by drivers while driving is not changing and in fact lives are being lost and seriously impacted due to this distraction.

Sincerely,

Lauren V. Stewart, Director

Major Brian Scott, Maine State Police

cc: Commissioner Michael J. Sauschuck

Buckle Up. Drive Safely.



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