House Transportation
Texas Medical Association and Texas Pediatric Society
Testimony on HB 27 Martinez Fischer, HB 41 Menendez, HB 63 Craddick, HB 347 Pitts

Good morning Chair Phillips and members of the committee. The Texas Medical Association and the Texas Pediatric Society, representing more 47,000 physicians and medical students, are here in strong support of the legislation to reduce distracted driving in Texas. Texas physicians support House Bill 27, House Bill 41, House Bill 63, and House Bill 347. I am Theodore Spinks, MD, a board certified neurosurgeon and spine surgeon in Austin speaking on behalf of Texas physicians and our patients.

Distracted driving is not safe. Texting while you drive is dangerous and it has the potential to kill Texans on our roadways. As a physician, I know. I see the results of distracted driving firsthand.

Distracted driving, such as texting interferes with your ability to drive – a few seconds is all it takes to find yourself in an accident. Our brains have a limited ability to perform more than one cognitive task at one time. When your attention is focusing on something other than driving, your reaction time slows, and your driving ability is diminished.[1]

In 2011, 1 in 4 motor vehicle crashes in Texas, or 81,000 crashes, involved distracted driving.

Using a cell phone is distracting and it takes your mind off the main task of driving. Texting is considered one of the most dangerous, as it is a manual, visual, and mental distraction.

Sending or receiving a text message take's a driver's eyes from the road for an average of 4.6 seconds. That is the equivalent of driving 55 miles an hour driving the length of an entire football field, blind.[2]

Twenty five percent of U.S. adults report talking on their cell phones while driving regularly or fairly often.[3] Young drivers report more crashes while using their cell phones.[4]

More surveillance is needed to understand the problem and the most effective ways to intervene. The Texas A&M Transportation Institute is currently involved in studies on how texting while driving has an impact on driving ability and the impact of the driver's risk in using different types of devices used in texting, and driver demographics associated with texting while driving. To eliminate crashes involving distracted driving, we must understand the problem and improve awareness. We support initiatives to better understand distracted driving and education efforts to remind drivers about the risks associated with distracted driving.

Thank you for considering these bills.

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[1] Just MA, Keller TA, Cynkar J. A decrease in brain activation associated with driving when listening to someone speak. Brain Research. 2008. 70. Accessed online http://www.distraction.gov/research/PDF-Files/carnegie-mellon.pdf.
[2] US DOT. Driver distraction in commercial vehicle operations. 2009. Accessed online http://www.distraction.gov/research/PDF-Files/Driver-Distraction-Commercial-Vehicle-Operations.pdf.
[3] CDC. Distracted driving. Accessed online. http://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/distracted_driving/index.html.
[4] US DOT. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Young drivers report highest level of phone involvement in crash or near-crash incidences. Traffic Safety Facts. Accessed online http://www.distraction.gov/download/research-pdf/Distelsurvey.pdf.