

Murt remarks on House Bill 892

Every day in the United States nine people are killed and more than 1,000 injured in crashes that are determined to involve a distracted driver.

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, in 2015, more than 3,400 people were killed and an additional 391,000 were injured in motor vehicle crashes involving distracted drivers. Examined in another way, 10 percent of fatal crashes, 15 percent of injury crashes, and 14 percent of all police-reported traffic crashes were reported as distraction-affected.

Drivers 15-19 years old make up the largest proportion of drivers who were distracted at the time of the fatal crashes. And while distractions can come in many forms, the smart phone has become one of the major instruments endangering motorists.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates in 2015 that 660,000 drivers used an electronic device while behind the wheel during the daytime, and 14 percent of fatal distracted driving crashes involved a cell phone in use at the time of the wreck.

But there is a positive statistic that may show the way to improving road safety.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found that the number of 16- to 24-year-olds using a phone while behind the wheel fell more than a full percentage point, from 5.8 percent in 2014 to 4.6 percent in 2015, due in some part to educational efforts to stop cell phone use.

That's why House bill 892 is so important.

At its core, it targets a wide variety of behaviors, such as using electronic devices, grooming devices, food and drink, and reading printed material that can affect drivers.

My bill creates the new summary offense of 'distracted driving' if a driver is also found to be driving carelessly because of a phone or other device.

The fine for distracted driving in my bill would be \$50.

But just as important, my bill establishes the Driver Distraction Awareness Fund, which would be funded by those \$50 fines.

The sole purpose of the new fund would be to create more and better educational programs to show drivers, both new and more experienced, just how dangerous it is to remove your eyes from the road, even for a second.