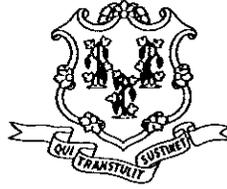


The Connecticut General Assembly

Distracted Driving Task Force

Chair:
Bob Brex

Co-Chair:
Frances Mayko



c/o Transportation Committee
Room 2300, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106
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Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on Transportation:

House Bill 6033 Public Act 13-271 Sec. 2 created a Task Force charged with examining the Distracted Driving statutes.

In the following report are several recommendations the Distracted Driving Task Force has made to better enhance the education Connecticut residents receive regarding distracted driving tips, as well as what several agencies are already doing to improve distracted driving awareness. The report also shows discussion topics, which were approved unanimously. The Task Force met three times, along with inviting speakers from the Law Enforcement and Government Agency Communities to speak to the Task Force in an Informational Hearing.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions, comments or concerns.

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Bob Brex

Distracted Driving Task Force Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Frances Mayko", written over a horizontal line.

Frances Mayko

Distracted Driving Task Force Co-Chair

The Distracted Driving Task Force was established to study issues concerning the prevention of distracted driving in the state. The Task Force accomplished this by (1) evaluating the effectiveness of existing laws prohibiting distracted driving, (2) examining distracted driving enforcement, (3) considering any federal efforts to prevent distracted driving, (4) considering distracted driving efforts in other states, and (5) developing recommendations, including any necessary legislative changes, to prevent distracted driving in Connecticut. They discussed and suggested the following:

Discussion and Suggestions

Fines for 1st offense:

The Task Force agreed to leave the tiered fine system in place as it was created Public Act 13-271. This will allow enough data to be collected to determine whether changes need to be made or if the fine amounts are adequate. Considering that 25% of distracted driving fines are returned to the municipality where that town's police officers issued the violations, the Distracted Driving Task Force thought of other possible funding opportunities for the money received from fines.

Crash data

The Connecticut Transportation Institute and the Connecticut Department of Transportation have established the Connecticut Transportation Safety Research Center at UConn's Depot Campus in Storrs, CT. The crash data information will be maintained by this center starting January 2015. The Crash Data Repository (CDR) is an important tool in accessing and analyzing crash data. It is the adoption of a Model Minimum Uniform Crash Criteria (MMUCC 4) and the revision of the crash reporting form, the PR-1, that will allow additional data elements related to driver distraction to be collected and analyzed. This will give decision makers, policy specialists, law enforcement and other highway safety advocates the tools to identify and mitigate sources of distracted driving crashes resulting in injuries and fatalities. Commissioner Currey is encouraged by the program because the data will allow the Department of Motor Vehicles and the Department of Transportation to make informed decisions about transportation and traffic safety issues. The program has the Task Force's full support.

Support/Continuation of E-citation rollout

Electronic Citation (E-citation) is an initiative that, when fully implemented, will result in the capability for all police agencies to record and submit all of the traffic citations they issue in a fully electronic form. This initiative promises both to save police significant time in processing traffic stops at the roadside, and to expedite submission of these actions for adjudication. The state police are significantly ahead in the use of E-citation and have reported significant increases in efficiency as a result. Some local police agencies are participating in a pilot program of the E-citation concept at this time as well. The Connecticut DMV's CVSD (Commercial Vehicle Safety Division) officers all use the E-citation system as well, which saves 10-15 minutes per traffic stop.

E-citation has multiple advantages along with saving time on a traffic stop. They include:

- Less time spent roadside, increasing safety for both law enforcement and drivers.
- Less time per citation frees law enforcement to attend to other enforcement activity.

- Accuracy of information collected as well as passed to downstream recipients increased due to less manual entry.
- Duplicate entry is eliminated system wide thereby increasing accuracy and timeliness.
- Citations received and processed on average in three days as opposed to 28 days in the manual system.
- Convictions noted on driver history in a more timely manner and available to law enforcement and prosecutors.
- E-citations is utilized for all citations (both motor vehicle infractions and criminal infractions) Basically any infraction or payable violation through the Centralized Infractions Bureau.

Some police agencies are in a position to implement changes more rapidly than others. E-citation requires the police vehicle to be equipped with a printer and associated mounting hardware at a cost of approximately \$800 per vehicle. E-citation proponents estimate that equipping all police vehicles with E-citation would cost approximately \$2-4million. The rate at which E-citation propagates through the law enforcement community will depend on provision of that funding. The Task Force requests the legislature to aggressively seek federal dollars to fund E-citation equipment and record keeping. The Task Force also has suggestions on ways this initiative can be funded.

Currently, 25% of distracted driving fines are returned to the municipality where that towns police officers issued the violations. The Distracted Driving Task Force has suggested that some of this money be used to help fund the E-citation initiative. The Task Force also asks that the Office of Fiscal Analysis research how distracted driving fines are being tracked. The Task Force believes if it became necessary to raise fines, drivers would be more willing to pay them if they knew the money would be used to improve traffic safety in CT. The use of the E-citation system improves traffic safety, especially drivers if they're pulled over and for officers making traffic stops.

The Distracted Driving Task Force also noted this initiative needs to demonstrate that costs are offset and there would be no fiscal notes. The state must give it time to roll out so it can demonstrate what it costs and where it saves the state money.

Education/information campaigns

The Task Force fully supports and compliments the work the DOT, Public Safety, DMV and the Department of Public Health has done to educate and inform residents about safe driving. Driving schools and the DMV have a distracted driving curriculum and educational campaign in place, which include programs like the teen driving campaign. There is also the Save A Life Tour, which is a DOT initiative. The Task Force, however, would like to expand these efforts, especially to younger children. Much like the drug campaigns targeted at very young children, educating a child at an early age about the dangers of distracted driving can be beneficial to both the child and his or her guardian.

The Task Force asks the legislature to take the following suggestions into account:

Start distracted driver education as early as kindergarten. It will teach kids to not text and drive or talk and drive at an early age. It will also encourage them as passengers to dissuade the driver from doing it,

as well. This could also be coupled with various commercials or public service announcements, showing the dangers and negative outcomes of distracted driving when someone isn't focused on the road.

Make distracted driving part of elementary or middle school Health class curriculum. Distracted Driving ties in with the drinking and driving curriculum; seeing the dangers of each side by side would be helpful to students. The Task Force also suggests funding for the distracted driving curriculum could partner with funding for drinking and driving education. The Task Force also recommended that proponents against distracted driving could partner with MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) to advocate both messages.

The Task Force also suggested the legislature look into creating program grants for schools. The program would be a monthly seminar that shows the dangers of distracted driving. If possible, this extra funding could be added to a grant a school may have already in place for drinking and driving education.

Driver education requirements/enhanced

Currently the DMV is researching the age at which people are acquiring their licenses. There's a trend that teens are waiting until they're 18 – 19 before they get their driver's licenses. The DMV will continue to look at teen driving requirements and decide to enhance them after additional study occurs.

Last year, a distracted driving question was added to the driver's license exam, a request from the DOT and DMV. This request was made specifically to bring Connecticut statute into compliance with Federal MAP-21 requirements for 405(e) funding criteria. The Task Force asks that regardless if any enhancements are made to the exam that the distracted driving question itself is retained so Connecticut can remain eligible for federal distracted driving funding.

Signage and Texting Areas

Texting and driving has become a greater problem over the years and Connecticut has taken measures to minimize it, such as various campaigns and ticketing. The Task Force is pleased with the measures already taken, but offers several recommendations the legislature should consider to combat distracted driving.

Some neighboring states, like New York, are placing signage along the interstate, suggesting drivers pull into the nearest rest area or commuter parking to text or talk. Such signage will provide advance and onsite notification of rest areas as texting areas to influence drivers not to do it on the road. The DOT is in the process of developing a "Request for Proposal" (RFP) for private sponsorship of the State's rest areas and/or welcome centers. Some members of the Committee would like to see commuter lots added to the list of areas for DOT to consider. The DOT voiced concerns about including this in due to where they are in the process. The Committee did not take a position concerning this.

Another suggestion is to use the overhead electronic signage on interstates that are used for such periodic safety messages as "Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over" and "Click it or Ticket." The DOT is looking into Federal Highway Administration requirements for the usage of these variable message boards. Before this suggestion can be implemented, however, more research is needed because there may be some federal funding restrictions on the types of messages that may appear. The DOT must investigate the feasibility of for the signage, such as cost an installation.

Point system/retraining

Last session the Transportation Committee enacted a point system to apply one point to someone's license that increase their insurance rates, which they hope will influence drivers to be more cautious. There is a \$100 fine already in place, but the belief is that a point system would be more influential to drivers to not drive distracted because a fine can be a onetime payment, but a point application on a license carries a much heavier consequence. The Task Force would like the point system to stay as is since it was only implemented last year and they'd like to collect more data to see if it is altering driver's habits before any changes are made.

Funding to local PD for distracted driving enforcement

Members of the Task Force spoke with various Police Chiefs who have said additional funding for distracted driving would be beneficial. Police Departments are looking into grants that would allow them to have dedicated officers, spotting distracted drivers. They can then radio ahead the appropriate vehicle information, such as the license plate number, to another officer up the road so that officer can make the traffic stop.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is working on a program for distracted driving education. The project titled "Texting Ban Enforcement Demonstration" is an enforcement program to test whether "High Visibility Enforcement" (HVE) can change driver behavior related to texting while driving as well as identify strategies law enforcement can use to successfully identify and cite motorists in violation of Connecticut's texting laws.

The pilot area consists of towns in the Danbury area including Bethel, Brookfield, Danbury, Monroe, Newtown Ridgefield and Redding. Connecticut State Police Troop A is also participating in enforcement in these areas. The control site for this project contains towns in the New London area including New London, Norwich Montville, East Lyme and Waterford.

The DOT applied in 2012 for 405(e) funding totaling \$275,000 to test if law enforcement could affect drivers and texting. The program wraps up in June.

The Highway Safety office of DOT plans to implement grant funded enforcement programs related to distracted driving at the conclusion of the pilot program.

Another suggestion the Task Force proposed was to increase the number of E-citation capabilities to include other traffic incidents such as speeding. This would make extra funding more attractive because extra fines would go toward the safety of drivers and police officers.

Currently, Police Departments receive federal funding for both seatbelt checks and DUI checkpoints, separately. This funding is more restricted because the Federal government prohibits a department from using seatbelt money for alcohol related road incidents. Given the restrictions, the Task Force requests that this funding source be left untouched to avoid losing funding already in place. The Department's Highway Safety Office received a grant from NHTSA based on statutory compliance with distracted driving laws, specifically geared toward use of mobile phones by drivers. The grant will aid accelerating the 'expanded' police enforcement that the Task Force recommends.