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**Testimony from Fran Mayko, Public Affairs Manager  
AAA Southern New England  
Committee on Transportation  
HB 5287 – An Act Concerning Distracted Driving  
In Public School Education**

Mr. Chairmen and members of the Transportation Committee . . .

My name is Fran Mayko. I am public affairs manager for AAA Southern New England. Our territory covers Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Fairfield, New Haven, and Litchfield Counties in Connecticut. We represent more than 3.5 million members in all 3 states, a half million of which are in Connecticut.

I was also co-chairman of the state's Distracted Driving Task Force, which was established to study issues concerning the prevention of distracted driving in the state.

I thank you for this opportunity to speak in support HB 5277: An Act concerning Distracted Driving in Public School Education.

As you're well aware, numerous public and private organizations already provide some type of educational program on the dangers of distracted driving. For example, Connecticut driving schools do a great job in covering the risks of cell phoning and texting while driving. So do organizations like AAA, Safe Kids, area police departments, hospitals and state agencies like the DMV and DOT.

In each of their own ways, these presentations are effective but they are generally targeted to one audience: teens and new drivers.

AAA feels – as do members of the Distracted Driving Task Force – that we should start the conversation about this important issue at a much younger age.

**(Please turn over)**

Encouraging Public Schools to cover the dangers and risks of distracted driving in its health or safety curricula would be another way to cultivate a more cohesive, more consistent and continuous message to help minimize this societal epidemic.

Distracted Driving opponents need to take their cues from organizations like MADD that has done a phenomenal job in hammering home its drunk-driving message. Other programs such as DARE (Drug and Alcohol Resistance Education) and "So No to Tobacco" have also proven to be effective in promoting anti-drug behavior. We see the benefits of these programs because messaging is continuous, long-term and introduced at a young age.

We need to do something similar concerning the issue of distracted driving.

Starting some type of dialogue, some type of discussion in elementary and middle schools is key to minimizing this social problem.

I say "minimize" because, like drugs and alcohol, we'll never eliminate distracted driving. Americans love their electronic gadgets too much; and we're just NOT willing to give up the conveniences of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

But that doesn't mean we shouldn't educate our children. It's imperative we make them understand that cell phoning, texting, and emailing while driving is just as unacceptable in our society as driving while drunk or impaired.