



**State of Connecticut**

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
STATE CAPITOL**

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PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE**

**Date: Feb 9, 2015**

**Testimony To Transportation Committee From Rep. Whit Betts**

**Increase Penalties For Texting and Driving or Using Hand Held Phones  
While Driving**

Good morning, Chairman, Ranking Members and Members of the  
Transportation Committee.

At the request of several people who live in Bristol and Plymouth I have  
submitted for your consideration a proposal that requires a substantial  
increase in penalties to people who cause accidents or fatalities because  
they were distracted with texting on their phone, or speaking on a hand held  
phone.

We have all heard anecdotes – and perhaps even have experienced ourself a  
situation – where people have nearly been hit by a driver who was not  
paying attention to the road. One of the most common reasons cited for this  
reckless driving were the use of phones at the same time as driving.

Since the advent of portable and smart phones this problem has grown at an  
alarming rate.

Allow me to cite just a few examples that show how big a problem distracted driving has become:

- The National Safety Council estimates that at least 1.6 Million crashes each year involve drivers using cell phones and texting.
- The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reported that **in 2012 driver distraction was the cause of 18 percent of all fatal crashes – with 3,328 people killed – and crashes resulting in an injury – with 421,000 people wounded.**
- Forty percent of all American teens say they have been in a car when the driver used a cell phone in a way that put people in danger, according to a Pew survey.
- The Virginia Tech Transportation Institute found that text messaging creates a crash risk 23 times worse than driving while not distracted.
- Eleven percent of drivers aged 18 to 20 who were involved in an automobile accident and survived admitted they were sending or receiving texts when they crashed.

Another important fact to highlight is adults are just as guilty as teenagers when it comes to distracted driving.

So what is the best way to eliminate distracted driving? The simple answer is we need to take personal responsibility for committing this crime. We can avoid the tragic consequences of an awful accident by making the decision not to use hand held phones or texting while driving.

However, until this attitude because the norm nationally we must pass severe penalties that are designed to deter us from distracted behavior. For example, suspension of a driver's license for 6 months for a first offense should certainly get our attention. Most of us are very dependent on driving to work, and we could not afford this type of penalty. Members of this committee may well have other or better suggestions.

Our common goal is obvious – let's do whatever it takes to eliminate distracted driving. If we are successful in meeting this goal then we will no longer read or hear about families whose lives have been ruined by a distracted driver.

Thanks for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Whit Betts".

Rep. Whit Betts  
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