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LEGISLATIVE ACTION ALERT

William Hamilton, President & Eastern PA Legislative Coordinator – Carl Bailey, Secretary-Treasurer & Western PA Legislative Coordinator - Tim O'Neill, Consultant – Dan Grace, Trustee & Legislative Advisor - Tom Kohn, Esq. Legal Advisor - Thomas Felice, Staff



Pennsylvania to ban cell phone use while driving and require police to collect traffic stop data

Pennsylvania will join the majority of states that ban motorists from handling a cell phone for almost any purpose while driving, as backers of the legislation hope to reduce distracted driving accidents and deaths after nearly two decades of pressing the measure.

Gov. Josh Shapiro’s office said that the Governor will sign the bill, 18 years after he first introduced a similar bill when he served in the state House of Representatives. **The ban will take effect a year after he signs it, which is expected in the coming days.** Shapiro called the bill “common sense.”

“I’ve met too many families that have an empty seat at the dinner table because of distracted driving. I’ve met too many people with injuries that they’re going to live with for the rest of their lives because they were hit by a distracted motorist,”

Pennsylvania is set to take significant steps to improve road safety. Here are the key points:

1. Cell Phone Use Ban While Driving:

- Pennsylvania will join the majority of states that ban motorists from handling a cell phone for almost any purpose while driving.
- Currently, Pennsylvania’s restriction on cell phone use while driving applies only to texting. However, the new legislation will broaden the ban to include other activities involving cell phones.
- **Drivers will be prohibited from handling their phones for almost any reason while driving, including tasks like browsing, scrolling, or using apps.**
- Exceptions include using the phone for navigational purposes or alerting emergency responders.

- Drivers can still make phone calls or use other functions (such as listening to music) if they do so hands-free using technology like a docking station, Bluetooth, or speakers.
- A first offense will result in a \$50 fine.
- **The ban will apply even when motorists are sitting in traffic or stopped at a traffic light.**
- However, it does not apply to drivers who have parked on the side of the road or in another safe location.

2. Data Collection on Traffic Stops:

- The legislation also includes a provision long-sought by the Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus to address racial profiling.
- Police departments (including the Pennsylvania State Police) and bigger police departments will be required to collect and publicly report data on traffic stops.
- The data will include information such as the reason for the stop, details from vehicle searches, and the race, ethnicity, age, and gender of the driver who was stopped.
- Police forces serving municipalities with populations under 5,000 people are exempt from this requirement.
- The data collection provision will take effect in a year and a half.

Other exceptions include for navigational use or alerting emergency responders. **A first offense is punishable by a \$50 fine and offenders who cause serious accidents could get more time in prison.**

This comprehensive approach aims to reduce distracted driving accidents and protect both drivers and pedestrians.

