

October 21, 2009

The Honorable John D. Rockefeller, Chairman
U.S. Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee
254 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kay Bailey Hutchison, Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee
560 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: Support for Federal Role in a Comprehensive Solution to Distracted Driving

Dear Chairman Rockefeller and Ranking Member Hutchison,

With significant national awareness now focused on the issue of distracted driving, in particular the safety risks associated with texting while driving, it is the hope of our respective organizations that important safety gains can be achieved as a result of this increased attention.

Our organizations support a comprehensive approach to addressing motor vehicle crashes based on sound and relevant research, and the issue of texting while driving is no exception. A critical component of any comprehensive safety approach involves legislative action. However, other elements such as research, data collection, public education, law enforcement and roadway countermeasures are also needed in order to change behavior and reduce the severity of any future distracted driving crashes.

Research findings support banning texting while driving due to the significant cognitive, visual and physical distractions that make it one of the most dangerous distracting activities on our roadways. It is the position of our organizations that the legislative momentum in the states of enacting texting while driving bans is strong and headed in the right direction. Our organizations continue to advocate for the adoption of these laws at the state level.

As you may know, it has been the long-standing policy of our organizations to oppose new federal traffic safety-related sanctions, including on the issue of distracted driving. But it would be inaccurate to characterize our opposition to sanctions as a rejection of any federal role in addressing this pressing issue.

Comprehensive and wide ranging solutions are needed to ensure laws enacted by states can be successful in achieving intended outcomes. Our organizations suggest the following areas be identified by the federal government as necessary components of an overall strategy to reduce distracted driving and resulting fatalities and serious injuries:

- **Research and Data** - Sponsor research to determine the nature and scope of the distracted driving problem. It is very difficult to ascertain the entirety of the threat of distracted driving given that the public is often unlikely to readily admit guilt in a crash investigation. Special studies are needed to determine the true incidence of cell phone use or texting on crash rates. Naturalistic driving studies, such

as the Strategic Highway Research Program 2 (SHRP2) should continue to be fully funded. Also, additional study of the effectiveness of state bans is needed through pre-law assessments and post-law evaluations.

The policy parameters of the distracted driving issue cannot be fully shaped in the absence of quality, reliable data. We need to do a much better job of collecting and utilizing information to help us address this emerging safety issue. One of the challenges we face is inadequate data on serious injury crashes including those in which distraction is a contributing factor. It should be noted that more robust and uniform injury data collection would better inform a wide range of traffic safety programs and interventions.

- **Education and Awareness** - Fund a multi-pronged communications campaign, possibly with the engagement of private partners, to alert the public to the dangers of distracted driving. This effort is needed to help develop a culture of safety that will make distracted driving socially unacceptable, similar to the way drunk driving has come to be perceived by the vast majority of the public. These communications messages must be developed in a process utilizing qualitative research methods. Also, collaboration with public health educators and behavior change experts should be a critical component to this initiative.

- **Enforcement and Training** - Fund research to develop effective methods for enforcing distracted driving bans. While a number of states and localities currently have banned texting while driving, enforcing such bans has proven difficult. The federal government should establish a compilation of best enforcement practices utilized in law enforcement jurisdictions across the country. Congress should increase federal funds to be used for training purposes for law enforcement personnel regarding proper identification of distracted driving violations.

- **Roadway Countermeasures** - Prioritize and fund research on the most effective ways to engineer roads and make roadsides safer in order to minimize the severity of crashes caused by distracted driving. Establish a communications plan to inform policymakers and the public on the effect roadway countermeasures - such as center and edge line rumble strips and stripes, guardrails and median cable barriers - can have on minimizing crashes, deaths and serious injuries caused by driver distraction.

We believe there is an important federal role in addressing this challenging issue. Clearly, as is evident by the federal government's effectiveness on other high priority traffic safety goals such as curbing drunk driving and increasing seat belt usage, Congress and the executive branch can do much to provide leadership and financial support to make our roadways safer.

We look forward to working with your committee to develop solutions on the distracted driving issue. Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,



Kathleen F. Marvaso
Vice President, Public Affairs
AAA



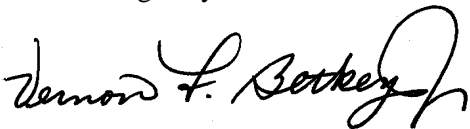
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Vernon F. Betkey Jr.
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CC: Chairman Barbara Boxer, U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
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Chairman Patty Murray, U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Transportation Appropriations
Ranking Member Christopher S. Bond, U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Transportation
Appropriations