

Press



Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ROCKLAND LEGISLATURE VOTES TO BAN TEXT MESSAGING WHILE DRIVING

New City, NY (December 17, 2008) – The Rockland County Legislature voted last night to ban text messaging while driving in Rockland County. The law, which was sponsored by Rockland County Legislative Chairwoman Harriet D. Cornell, bans motorists from using wireless handsets to compose, read or send text messages while operating a motor vehicle on any public street or public highway within the County of Rockland. The vote was 16-1 in favor of passage.

Rockland County is the fourth county in New York State to pass a law prohibiting texting while driving. The others are Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester Counties. Alaska, California, Connecticut, Louisiana, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Washington State have all passed statewide laws, as has the District of Columbia.

“Our roads and highways are made more dangerous by electronic communication devices that inevitably distract drivers, break their concentration, and draw their attention away from the real business at hand, namely driving,” said Cornell. “Driving and texting is a dangerous and deadly combination.”

Cornell noted that according to studies conducted by the American Automobile Association (AAA), any activity that takes a driver’s attention off the road for more than two seconds can double a driver’s risk of crash. In addition, a 2006 joint report issued by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute found that nearly 80% of crashes and 65% of near-crashes observed in their study involved a driver distracted in the three seconds prior to an accident.

According to Cornell, the use of wireless handsets by law enforcement, emergency and fire personnel in the performance of their duties, and motorists using such devices to contact law enforcement or emergency and fire personnel would be exempt under the law. The law also exempts motorists using such devices while their motor vehicle is parked, standing or stopped and is removed from the flow of traffic, or is stopped due to the inoperability of such motor vehicle.

When New York State banned motorists from talking on hand-held cellular phones in 2001, text messaging was fairly uncommon. Since that time, however, text messaging has become a very popular form of communication. According to CTIA – The Wireless Association, which is the international association for the wireless telecommunications industry, more than 384 billion text

messages were sent during the first six months of this year, which is 22 billion more text messages than were sent in all of 2007. 75 billion text messages were sent in June 2008 alone, which translates to approximately 2.5 billion messages a day. That figure represents a 160% increase over the 2.8 billion text messages that were sent in June 2007, just one year earlier.

Cornell said that she hopes this new law will help prevent new, younger drivers from causing accidents that easily could have been avoided had they been focusing on the road instead of a wireless texting device.

Cornell noted that a 2008 study conducted by the Nationwide Mutual Insurance Company found that while 18% of all drivers reported that they send text messages while driving, that number climbed to 39% among drivers between the ages of 18 and 30.

“The last thing that a young and relatively inexperienced driver needs is something that will divert his or her attention away from the road,” said Cornell, “Young drivers need to understand that texting while driving can have a catastrophic result.”

Cornell pointed out that there are several bills pending in the New York State Legislature to ban texting while driving. However, in the absence of a statewide law addressing text messaging while driving, and until such time as the New York State Legislature does take action, this local law is warranted in order to protect motorists and pedestrians in Rockland County.

“When New York adopted legislation prohibiting motorists from talking on hand-held cell phones while driving, the widespread use of text messaging that we see today was not foreseeable, creating a dangerous gap in the law,” said Rockland County Sheriff James F. Kralik. “Harriet Cornell and the Legislature have filled this gap by expanding the law’s reach to include texting while driving. Rockland is once again leading efforts to protect the public. The Sheriff’s Department will continue partnering with the community on efforts to curb distracted driving including public education about the dangers of texting while driving.”

The bill now goes to County Executive C. Scott Vanderhoef for his approval.

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