

STATEMENT OF
Jennifer Weaver, Distracted Driving Prevention Advocate
In Support of the Passage of Senate Bill 819
Before the Maryland Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 27, 2020

Good morning. My name is Jennifer Weaver from North Beach, Maryland, and I am pleased to join you today in support of Senate Bill 819.

Distracted driving is a major public health problem on our Nation's roads. The use of mobile phones while driving can result in cognitive distraction that is as impairing as drunk driving. Studies have shown that crash risk can be as much as four times higher when a driver is using a mobile phone. In fact, sending or receiving a text message can cause a driver to divert their eyes from the road for an average of nearly five seconds. When traveling at 55 miles per hour that is enough time to cover the length of an entire football field – all while your eyes are not on the road.

This dangerous action can have deadly consequences. In 2018, the latest year for which data is available, nearly three thousand people were killed and approximately 400,000 more were injured nationwide in crashes involving a distracted driver. Crashes in which at least one driver was identified as being distracted also impose an annual economic cost on society of approximately \$40 billion, and we know that these numbers do not paint the whole picture considering underreporting of these type of crashes.

More can and must be done to prevent distracted driving crashes, and let me be clear – these are not accidents. Distracted driving is preventable and there are known actions which can curb these needless tragedies. SB 819 is one of those actions. This bill would allow the Maryland State Police and Maryland counties to establish a program to enforce distractive driving violations through the use of two types of devices. The first is a camera mounted on a police car or enforcement vehicle that captures images by video stream of drivers texting or talking on a cell phone. The second is a camera that is stationary and fixed to a pole or other immobile structure similar to a speed or red light camera. SB 819 would enable the State Police and counties the option of implementing one or both of these technologies.

At a time when multitasking and cell phone addiction have become the norm, no one thinks they will be the one to cause a distracted driving crash. No one gets into his or her car thinking, “I am going to answer a call or read a text while driving and kill someone as a consequence.” However, I am here to tell you that it can happen to anyone and all it takes is a split-second decision to take your eyes off the road. On December 22, 2015, I was the at-fault driver in a crash that resulted in a fatality in Charles County. A car was stopped to make a left-hand turn, and while I do not have a recollection of the moments leading up to the crash itself, it was determined by investigators that I was looking down at my phone when I rear-ended that car, pushing it into oncoming traffic. The occupant was pronounced deceased at the scene.

A loved one was lost that day. A wonderful, vital member of a family no longer walks this Earth because of me. So many tragic consequences have come to bear because my eyes were not on the road for five seconds. I carry sorrow and guilt on my heart that I doubt will ever be lifted, so I join other distracted driving prevention advocates here today to share my story because I have made it my life's mission to educate about the dangers of distracted driving, to push for the passage of legislation such as SB 819, and to urge all to put away your devices and stay focused on the responsibilities of driving.

Thank you.