

Wisconsin Legislature: Legislators unveil “data-distracted driving” bill

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MADISON – This morning, three Republican Legislators released legislation which will update Wisconsin’s texting while driving laws to address new technologies and electronic devices. The bill, authored by Senator Van Wanggaard (R-Racine) and Representatives Ron Tusler (R-Harrison) and Shannon Zimmerman (R-River Falls), expands the distracted driving statute to include entering, transmitting, or accessing data while driving, increases the minimum penalty for data-distracted driving to \$100, and clarifies that a death caused by data-distracted driving constitutes homicide by negligent use of a vehicle.

“Data-distracted driving goes far beyond just mere texting, and it can be just as dangerous as drunk driving,” said Wanggaard. “You see it on the roads all the time, people texting, tweeting, using Facebook, or reading email. It’s dangerous and has got to stop.”

“This bill expands the scope of distracted driving beyond the current texting and emailing prohibition to include Facebook posting, tweeting, and snapchatting,” said Tusler. “By doing so, it will make roads safer and adapt to future technologies that may distract drivers.”

Under the bill, the specific references under the inattentive driving statutes related to text messages and email are replaced by a broader definition of transmitting or

accessing data while using an interactive electronic device. There are exemptions in the bill for verbal communications and navigation. Penalties are increased from a minimum \$20 fine, to a minimum \$100 fine. In addition, the bill makes clear that data-distracted driving constitutes negligent operation of a vehicle.

“This bill today is a significant step in the proper direction of raising awareness and increasing the punishment for those who recklessly let themselves shift their attention from safely operating a motor vehicle,” said Zimmerman. “Let’s continue to raise awareness and support fewer accidents and the saving of more Wisconsin lives.”

Ben Wagner, the president of Wisconsin Association for Justice joined the legislators in unveiling the bill. Over the last two years, the number of deaths on Wisconsin roads related to distracted driving has increased by more than 68%. Last year alone, there were over 25,000 distracted driving accidents resulting in more than 11,000 injuries in Wisconsin.

The legislators hope the bill will become law by the end of the year.