



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

Griffo's Efforts to Curb Distracted Driving Move Forward

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO June 22, 2011

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Griffo's Efforts To Curb Distracted Driving Move Forward

(Albany) - State Senator Joseph A. Griffo (R-C-IP, Rome) today noted that his long-standing efforts to address the safety issue of distracted driving have moved forward with Senate passage of a bill (Senate # 5643) that will make it easier for law enforcement to crack down on texting-while-driving offenses and prevent tragic accidents caused by drivers distracted by texting. The state Assembly has also approved the measure.

“Driving is a responsibility that too few people are taking seriously,” Griffo said. “Districted driving is an issue of life and death, because too many lives are disrupted through tragic accidents caused by texting while driving or other misuse of hand-held devices. I would have hoped that drivers themselves would have realized the tremendous safety risk involved, but despite the widespread publicity given to texting-while-driving and the accidents it causes, the incidence has gone up and not down. We are acting to save lives.”

The bill would make text messaging while driving a primary violation rather than a secondary violation. Under the current law, a driver can only be cited for texting-while-driving if another violation, such as speeding, is also being cited.

The bill is supported by the American Automobile Association (AAA) of New York. Federal data shows 16,000 deaths nationwide due to texting while driving. According to a study by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute, a driver is 23 times more likely to be involved in an accident while text messaging.

Griffo noted this summary of texting while driving accidents in New York:

- June 26, 2007, Fairport, Monroe County- Five teenagers who had just graduated from Fairport High School were killed when the SUV they were in veered into the path of an oncoming tractor trailer. The driver's cell phone had sent and received text messages moments before the crash.
- December 3, 2007, West Seneca, Erie County - 20 year-old old A.J. Larson was killed in a car crash. He was reportedly text messaging when he rolled through stop sign and was hit by a truck. Since his death, his mother, Kelly Klein, has been on a mission calling for stricter penalties when it comes to distracted driving.

- November 30, 2009, Huron, Wayne County – A woman was killed when she veered into the path of a truck while she was texting, according to police.
- April 2010 – SUNY Geneseo student Mary Kavanaugh, 22, was killed when she veered off the road and flipped her car. Authorities believe she was text messaging while driving.
- January 9, 2011 – A Cayuga County woman, Tina Nevlezer, 27, was injured when she crashed into a tractor trailer. Authorities say she was text messaging while driving.
- February 2011 – A Baldwinsville Central School bus driver was accused of reading text messages while driving students. The driver's route called for driving students from kindergarten through 5th grade. The driver was ultimately not charged since texting while driving is a secondary offense.

Senate bill 5643 will be delivered to the Governor for his consideration of approving it into law.