



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## Texting while driving ban shows the power of grassroots advocacy; Bee News Guest Column

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY August 1, 2011

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New York State has taken an important step forward in our fight against distracted driving. **Texting while driving is now a primary violation of the law**, and it's in large part due to the relentless advocacy of Kelly Cline and the still-growing **Families Against Texting While Driving**.

In 2009, the state passed legislation that made texting and driving only a secondary offense, meaning law enforcement could only stop a texting driver if he or she committed another violation first.

As Kelly Cline will tell you, that secondary law was not enough.

If you wait for a texting driver to commit another infraction before you stop them, it could be too late. The moment when that individual starts speeding, runs a red light or drives over the yellow line – that may be the moment when texting turns into tragedy.

Taking your eyes off the road for just seconds can be long enough to cause a devastating crash. Texting while driving has been a deadly distraction, and it has caused far too many families to endure preventable tragedies. It's time for it to end.

This law serves as a launching point. It empowers law enforcement with the tools they need to crack down on distracted driving, and it is helping spread awareness of the urgent need to stop the lethally dangerous habit of texting behind the wheel.

When Kelly Cline lost her son A.J. Larson in a texting-while-driving accident in 2007, she made it her mission to prevent other families from suffering through similar tragedies. She channeled the energy and emotion into a determined fight to end distracted driving, starting with her tireless campaign to pass a law banning texting from New York's roads.

After Albany dropped the ball with the secondary offense legislation in 2009, Kelly and I worked together when I was a county legislator to make texting while driving a primary offense in Erie County.

But understanding that a patchwork of county laws is less effective, Kelly and I took the fight back to Albany to push for a statewide anti-texting law.

We helped Kelly form Families Against Texting While Driving – which she led with a laser-sharp focus on getting this distracted driving law passed this year. The organization, under Kelly's direction and leadership, wrote letters and emails and called lawmakers to urge them to act. This outreach, combined with our work behind the scenes, added critical momentum to our efforts.

Because of Kelly Cline's almost four years of non-stop advocacy, Families Against Texting

While Driving proved successful as a very strong voice – Albany listened.

It's because of the grassroots advocacy starting here in Western New York with Kelly Cline that New York State has finally stepped up its efforts to crack down on distracted driving and make our roads safer. By aiming to eliminate behind-the-wheel distractions, this law will help save lives.

To Kelly Cline and the hundreds of Western New Yorkers who have helped propel this issue forward, thank you for your years of hard work in the fight against distracted driving.