

OUR OPINION: Evidence dictates ban on texting while driving

by NEMS Daily Journal

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Mississippi legislators should pay close attention to developments in a trial involving a family's effort in a state circuit court to gain a showing of a video of a truck driver allegedly texting just before his vehicle struck another vehicle from the rear, killing the driver.

The case is before Judge Andy Howorth in the Marshall County Circuit Court, and the case involves an April 11, 2011,

fatality near the Auburn Road exit off U.S. 78 in Lee County.

Mississippi does not prohibit texting while driving unless the driver holds only a learner's permit; the law in that situation bans cell phone use, the platform for texting.

Most other states, we believe with better judgment than so far shown in Mississippi, ban texting while driving because it requires distracted driving - taking a driver's attention off the road several seconds at a time.

The legislative issue should be revisited; Mississippi should ban texting while driving for all drivers, based on a large body of research and accident evidence from many places showing the danger inherent in distracted driving.

The well known Insurance Institute for Highway Safety follows the texting issue closely because of the impacts on the insurance industry.

This is the IIHS information summary:

- * Talking on a hand-held cellphone while driving is banned in 10 states (California, Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Washington, and West Virginia) and the District of Columbia.
- * The use of all cellphones by novice drivers is restricted in 31 states and the District of Columbia and the use of all cellphones while driving a school bus is prohibited in 19 states and the District of Columbia.
- * Text messaging is banned for all drivers in 38 states and the District of Columbia.

Public safety and traffic laws are the state's responsibility. Allowing plainly unsafe,

voluntary practice like distracted driving, particularly the degree of distraction texting requires, is irresponsible.

Mississippi state Sen. Billy Hudson, R-Hattiesburg, has introduced legislation that would make using a cellular device while driving illegal, but colleagues have turned a blind eye. We'd settle for a ban on texting, since it's more dangerous than simply talking on the phone - though that's a distraction, too.

Driving has been and remains an action requiring a driver's full attention.

Acknowledge that fact. Ban texting by all drivers all the time.

The U.S. Department of Transportation says sending text messages is most dangerous because it requires intentional visual, manual and mental attention from the driver.

Revise the law. Protect lives.

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