

For Immediate Release
February 22, 2019

Contact: [Maria Sink](#)
919-807-6017

Contact: [Barry Smith](#)
919-807-6014

Insurance Commissioner Causey backs distracted driving legislation to save lives, cut insurance costs

RALEIGH – North Carolina Insurance Commissioner Mike Causey is backing legislation that would ban handheld cellphone use while driving as a means of saving lives, preventing injuries and driving down automobile insurance costs.

The Hands Free NC Act was introduced in the N.C. General Assembly on Thursday as a means to cut down on the number of deaths caused by distracted driving. According to AAA Carolinas, more than 123 people died in 2018 as a result of distracted driving.

“I want to commend Rep. Kevin Corbin for introducing this legislation, and give kudos to the other primary sponsors, Reps. Jon Hardister, John Torbett and Garland Pierce for recognizing the dangers associated with distracted driving, especially from cell phone use,” Commissioner Causey said. “Distracted driving also plays a role in automobile insurance premium rates, so passing this bill is a win-win for everyone. “

The bill, called [Hands Free NC](#), has bipartisan support. It would prohibit the hand-held use of a cellphone or other wireless communications devices but allow the driver to make hands-free calls. Drivers 18 years old and older would be able to use their cellphones if the phone is mounted in the vehicle and the call can be initiated or terminated by touching a single button.

Provisions are made for drivers who need to make emergency calls or for emergency officers and first responders using a phone in their official duty.

Drivers caught violating the Hands Free NC law would face a \$100 fine for the first offense, a \$150 fine and one insurance point for the second offense, and a \$200 fine and two insurance points for subsequent offenses.

The proposal, if approved by the General Assembly and signed into law, would become effective on Jan. 1, 2020. Police officers would issue warning tickets during the first six-month grace period.

A recent study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety saw an increase in driver cellphone use, particularly manipulating a cellphone, from 2014 to 2018. The Institute estimates that cellphone use was a contributing factor in more than 800 crash deaths on U.S. roads in 2017.

“Distracted driving has become one of the leading causes of automobile accidents, along with speeding and driving while intoxicated. Unless we take corrective action now, we’ll see accidents increase that will drive our automobile insurance rates higher and higher,” said Commissioner Causey.