



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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Assembly Bill 171

Testimony from Representative John Spiros and Senator Sheila Harsdorf Assembly Committee on Transportation

May 12, 2015

We would like to thank Representative Ripp and the committee members for allowing us to testify today in favor of Assembly Bill 171.

Senator Harsdorf and I have authored this legislation to discourage distracted driving in Wisconsin. AB 171 would prohibit a person from driving a motor vehicle while wearing headphones or earbuds in both ears. The bill has exemptions for sanitation workers, drivers of emergency vehicles, motorcyclists wearing a helmet with integrated headphones, or people wearing hearing aids.

Each year, there are between 125,000 and 150,000 car accidents in Wisconsin. Between 50,000 and 60,000 people are injured in those accidents and more than 700 people are killed. Distracted driving is often a factor in these crashes. Our bill seeks to reduce the distraction of headphones, so motorists will have all senses available to navigate the conditions on the roadway.

Last year alone 267 deaths occurred at railroad crossings. Drivers approaching these crossings are advised to “Stop, Listen and Look” for trains before proceeding. But how can a driver “Listen” if they have headphones in their ears? By reducing distractions, we hope to reduce the number of car accidents and fatalities each year.

Many of the headphones that are used today are specifically made to be noise canceling, which would not allow a driver to hear a siren, another driver’s horn or even a train whistle. Hearing these warning sounds is critical to a driver’s ability to react and prevent a crash.

Thirteen other states have passed legislation regulating the use of headphones while driving, including our neighboring states of Illinois and Minnesota.

Thank you again for allowing us to testify on AB 171. We ask for your support and would be happy to answer any questions.