



Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety

April 19, 2010

Honorable Christine Kehoe
Chairperson, California State Senate Committee on Appropriations
The Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: SB 1475 (Simitian) -- Strengthened Enforcement to Curb Distracted Driving -- SUPPORT

Dear Senator Kehoe:

Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety (CARS) is a national, award-winning non-profit auto safety and consumer advocacy organization dedicated to preventing motor vehicle-related fatalities, injuries, and economic losses.

CARS urges your support for SB 1475 (Simitian), which will strengthen enforcement of California's existing laws against cell phone use and texting while driving. Not only will SB 1475 save lives and prevent injuries, but it will also help reduce the enormous economic toll exacted by motor vehicle crashes. As the California Highway Patrol recently stated, reducing the numbers and severity of vehicle crashes also saves our state billions of dollars:

"Although final statistics are not yet available, preliminary numbers show that in the three years since the increase in new officers, approximately 700 fewer people have died on the state's highways and unincorporated areas - roadways primarily the responsibility of the CHP, according to CHP statistics.

The economic savings as a result are estimated at more than \$3 billion, using statistics from the National Safety Council that approximates the average cost of fatal and nonfatal injuries from motor vehicle crashes. During the same time, preliminary statistics show there were over 19,000 fewer people injured resulting in a potential savings of nearly \$4 billion. The calculable costs of motor-vehicle crashes are wage and productivity losses, medical expenses, administrative expenses, motor vehicle damage, and employers' uninsured costs."¹

By allowing the CHP to levy higher fines for violations -- particularly for repeat offenses -- SB

¹ Deaths from traffic collisions in California on track for an all-time low," The Californian, April 15, 2010.

1475 strengthens the agency's ability to enforce the law effectively.

The bill's emphasis on stronger enforcement to curb violations among the highest-risk age group --teenagers -- will help get young drivers started off on a safer track. The bill will make violation of the law against hand-held cell phone use and texting subject to primary enforcement for offenders under age 18. This is a wise step, due to the prevalence of texting and cell phone use among teenagers, and the inherent tendency of young people to have a dangerously inaccurate perception of the actual risks they face.

SB 1475 will also improve driver education regarding the hazards of cell-phone related distracted driving, via a carve-out of \$10 from the base amount of each fine. This is a singularly appropriate use of the funds generated by the fines, which will help inform Californians who are getting a new license, or renewing an old one, about the new law and the hazards of diverting their attention while driving on our roads and highways.

We commend Senator Simitian for his continued leadership in saving lives and reducing injuries and economic losses due to distracted driving. We strongly urge your support for this lifesaving, fiscally responsible measure.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. Should you or your staff have any questions regarding our position, please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rosemary Shahan".

Rosemary Shahan
President