



RHODE ISLAND SUPREME COURT

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March 4, 2025

Via Electronic Mail (HouseJudiciary@rilegislature.gov)

The Honorable Robert E. Craven, Jr.
House Committee on the Judiciary
Rhode Island State House
House Lounge
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

Re: House Bill #5901: An Act Relating to Motor and Other Vehicles – Miscellaneous Rules

Dear Chairman Craven:

I write on behalf of the Rhode Island Judiciary and the Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal (RITT) to express support for House Bill #5901, scheduled to be heard and considered this evening before the House Judiciary Committee. This legislation would amend RIGL § 31-22-30 to clarify that the use of a wireless communication device for the purpose of navigation may not be held in the driver's hand and must be mounted or otherwise affixed to the vehicle.

Currently, § 31-22-30 entitled "Text messaging while operating a motor vehicle" prohibits a person from "composing, reading, or sending text messages" while driving a motor vehicle. However, the current statute does not prohibit holding a wireless device for navigation or other unspecified purposes. As a result, motorists operating a vehicle while holding the cellphone claim they were using GPS navigation, operating music services, or even video chatting.

In an effort to clarify the conduct intended to be prohibited, the Judiciary proposes that the statute expressly prohibit an operator from holding a wireless device while operating a motor vehicle. This bill will preserve the exception for the use of GPS on any internal navigation unit in the vehicle but would require the phone be affixed or otherwise mounted in the vehicle when used for navigation purposes.

Additionally, the Rhode Island Department of Transportation has requested this bill include the following new section, "(b)(5) the use of a personal wireless communication device in a hands-free manner, with a hands-free accessory, or with the activation or deactivation of a feature or function of the personal wireless communication device with the motion of a single swipe or tap

of the finger. This exception to the general prohibition against holding the device was recently approved by the National Transportation Safety Administration.

I ask the House Judiciary Committee to consider passage of this legislation. Thank you for the opportunity to express the Judiciary's support for this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Kelly". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping "K" and "y".

Kathleen Kelly
General Counsel
Rhode Island Supreme Court