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March 3, 2025

The Honorable Robert E. Craven, Sr.
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: House Bill No. H5901 Relating to Motor and other Vehicles – Miscellaneous Rules.

Dear Chairman Craven:

I am writing on behalf of the Rhode Island Police Chiefs Association (RIPCA) to voice our strong support for the House bill referenced above clarifying the use of wireless communication devices while operating a motor vehicle.

Distracted driving accounts for approximately 3,000 deaths on our roadways each year across the Country. RI passed our law in 2018 in an attempt to curb the number of drivers talking on their phones while operating a motor vehicle and instituted an opportunity for first time violators to provide a proof of acquisition of a hands-free accessory subsequent to the violation, but prior to the imposition of a fine. Since the passing of this Statute RI law enforcement and RI Department of Transportation/Office of Highway Safety have worked diligently to educate the driving public of the dangers of talking on their phones while operating a motor vehicle.

The legislation change proposed in this bill would clarify some sections of the current law, which we fully support and believe there has been a tremendous amount of outreach and advertising around the dangers of driving distracted since the inception of our law in 2018. We would also suggest the violation be a pay by mail fine which will increase the enforcement of this Statute. Currently, an officer citing someone for this violation would be required to take the violator to court for a hearing even if they wanted to pay the fine. As you know taking a day out of work or finding arrangements for loved ones while the violator attends a court hearing compounds the effects on the violator.

Thank you for allowing me to submit this written testimony on behalf of the RIPCA and as always, I am available for any follow-up questions you or the committee may have, and we are willing to continue discussions with the bill's sponsors.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Sidney Wordell", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Sidney Wordell
Executive Director
Rhode Island Police Chiefs Association