

Bill to curtail distracted driving - testimony to legislative

STAFF REPORTS

While a ban on texting and driving is not new, Kentuckians may soon be asked to put their phones down while driving altogether.

Rep. James Tipton, R-Taylorsville, testified before the Interim Joint Committee on Transportation on Monday about his intentions to file a bill for the 2022 legislative session that would only allow the hands-free use of a personal communication device while driving.

“We’re talking about proposed legislation that’s intended to save lives and improve public safety,” Tipton said.

Under this proposed legislation, personal

communication devices are defined as a text messaging device, a stand-alone computer, a tablet, a laptop, a notebook computer, a personal digital assistant, a GPS system, a telephone or any device capable of displaying a video, movie, or visual image.

The measure would make using your hands to operate a personal communication device while driving illegal. It would also prohibit drivers from unbuckling their seatbelt to reach for a device.

Drivers can, however, use a hands-free Bluetooth device to make phone calls while driving.

Lawmakers cannot make any deci-

sions on any proposed legislation until the next legislative session begins on Jan. 4. Tipton said if the general assembly adopts this measure, there would be a grace period until Oct. 1, 2022, where drivers would receive a warning.

After the grace period, drivers would be fined at least \$50 but no more than \$100 for a first or second offense, according to a draft of the bill request. On third offense or if the offense results in an accident, the penalty would be at least \$100 but no more than \$199.

If the offense occurs in an active school zone or construction zone, the penalty would be at least \$200 but no

more than \$250. Traffic school would be allowed for a first offense.

Kentucky would not be the first state to implement this type of law, Tipton said. According to Jennifer Smith, CEO and founder of Stop-Distractions.org, 24 states have adopted this type of legislation, including Tennessee, Virginia and Indiana.

This not the first time Tipton has sponsored a bill like this. He sponsored House Bill 255 during the 2020 legislative session, which did not make it to a floor vote in either chamber.

Kathleen Strack, a co-founder of Two Eyes, Just Try, testified alongside Tipton

on Monday. Her brother died near Verona, Kentucky, in 2015 after his truck was hit by a distracted semi-truck driver. Strack said the driver of the semi had been sending and reading text messages for miles leading up to the accident.

“Distracted driving is 100% preventable, just like drunk driving,” Strack said. “The difference is drunk driving has become socially unacceptable. That’s not the case for distracted driving.”

Steve Blackstone, the state and local liaison for the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), also joined the conversation. He said NTSB supports this type of legislation.

“As a result of our investigations, we’ve seen firsthand that distraction is a growing and life-threatening problem,” Blackstone said. “To reduce the crashes and injuries and deaths, drivers completely need to refrain from engaging in these distractions.”

While discussing the proposed bill, a few lawmakers asked about the effectiveness of the state’s texting while driving ban. Tipton said that it is not uncommon for someone accused of texting while driving to say, “No, I wasn’t texting I was putting in a phone number,” or some other excuse. This legislation would attempt to close that loophole.

BBB warns of scams ahead of holiday shopping season

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With the holiday shopping season upon us, BBB serving Louisville, Southern Indiana, and Western Kentucky has issued a warning of the top 12 scams targeting consumers.

Misleading Social Media Ads:

As you scroll through your social media feed, you often see items for sale from a small business. BBB Scam Tracker receives reports of people paying for items that they never receive, getting charged monthly for a free trial they never signed up for, or receiving an item that is counterfeit or much different from the one advertised. The 2020 BBB Scam Tracker Risk Report found that online purchase scams were the most common cons reported to Scam Tracker and the category with the most victims. Check out the business profile on BBB.org and read the reviews.

Social Media Gift Exchanges:

Each holiday season this scheme pops back up, and this year is no different. A newer version of this scam revolves around exchanging bottles of wine; another suggests purchasing \$10 gifts online. Another twist asks you to submit your email into a list where participants get to pick a name and send money to strangers to “pay it forward.” In each version, participants unwittingly share their personal information, along with those of their family members and friends, and are further tricked into buying and shipping gifts or money to unknown individuals. And-- it’s an illegal pyramid scheme.

Holiday Apps:

Apple’s App Store and Google Play list dozens of holiday-themed apps where children can video chat live with Santa, light the menorah, watch Santa feed live reindeer, track his sleigh on Christmas Eve, or relay their holiday wish lists. This holiday season, like last year when COVID-19 caused children to skip the traditional in-person visit with Santa, apps may play a more important role than ever. Review privacy policies to see what information will be col-

lected. Be wary of free apps, as they can sometimes contain more advertising than apps that require a nominal fee. Free apps can also contain malware.

Alerts About Compromised Accounts:

BBB has been receiving reports on Scam Tracker about a con claiming your Amazon, Paypal, Netflix or bank account has been compromised. Victims receive an email, call, or text message which explains that there has been suspicious activity on one of their accounts, and it further urges them to take immediate action to prevent the account from being compromised. Be extra cautious about unsolicited calls, emails, and texts.

Free Gift Cards:

Scammers have been known to send bulk phishing emails requesting personal information to receive free gift cards. In some of these emails, scammers impersonate legitimate companies like Starbucks and promise gift cards to loyal customers that have been supporting their business throughout the pandemic. They may also use pop-up ads or send text messages with links saying you were randomly selected as the winner for a prize.

Temporary Holiday Jobs:

Retailers typically hire seasonal workers to help meet the demands of holiday shoppers. Shippers and delivery services are top holiday employers this year because of the increase in online orders and the need to get most of these packages delivered before Christmas. These jobs are a great way to make extra money, sometimes with the possibility of turning into a long-term employment opportunity. However, job seekers need to be wary of employment scams aimed

at stealing money and personal information from job applicants. Keep an eye out for opportunities that seem too good to be true.

Look-Alike Websites:

The holiday season brings endless emails offering deals, sales, and bargains. Be wary of emails with links enclosed. Some may lead to look-alike websites created by scammers to trick people into downloading malware, making dead-end purchases, and sharing private information. If you are uncertain about the email, do not click any of the links. Instead, hover over them to see where they reroute.

Fake Charities:

Donors are advised to look out for fraudulent charities and scammers pretending to be individuals in need. Avoid impromptu donation decisions to unfamiliar organizations. Responsible organizations will welcome a gift tomorrow as much as they do today. Verify a charity at BBB’s give.org or on the Canada Revenue Agency website. Where possible, donate to the charity through their website and use a credit card.

Fake Shipping Notifications:

More consumers are making purchases online, there is also an increase in the number of notifications about shipping details from retailers and carriers. Scammers are using this new surge to send phishing emails with links enclosed that may allow unwanted access to your private information or download malware onto your device. They may also try to trick people into paying new shipping fees.

Pop-Up Holiday Virtual Events:

This year, many local in-person events such as pop-up holiday markets or craft fairs, have moved online. Scammers are creating fake event pages, social media posts, and emails, charging

admission for what used to be a free event. The goal is to steal credit card information. Confirm with the organizer of the event if there is an admission fee. In the cases where there is a charge, use a credit card. If the event is free, watch for scammers trying to claim otherwise.

Top Holiday Wishlist Items:

Low or ridiculously priced luxury goods, jewelry, designer clothing, and electronics are almost always cheap counterfeits and knockoffs. This year, the Galactic Snackin’ Grogu Animatronic (aka Baby

Yoda) and game consoles are some of the items in high demand. Be very cautious when considering to purchase these high-value items from individuals through social sites.

Puppy Scams:

Many families, espe-

cially those with children, may be considering adding a furry friend to their household this year. However, you could fall victim to pet scams, which are on the rise this year. Request to see the pet in person before making a purchase.

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