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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2025

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A N A C T

RELATING TO MOTOR AND OTHER VEHICLES -- MISCELLANEOUS RULES

Introduced By: Senators Sosnowski, Raptakis, Tikoian, McKenney, and Burke

Date Introduced: February 26, 2025

Referred To: Senate Judiciary

(Judiciary)

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Section 31-22-30 of the General Laws in Chapter 31-22 entitled
2 "Miscellaneous Rules" is hereby amended to read as follows:

3 **31-22-30. ~~Text messaging while operating a motor vehicle~~ Distracted driving**
4 **prohibited while operating a motor vehicle.**

5 (a) For purposes of this section, the following terms shall have the following meanings:

6 (1) "Driving" means operating a motor vehicle on a public road, including operation while
7 temporarily stationary because of traffic, a traffic light or stop sign, or otherwise, but does not
8 include operating a motor vehicle when the vehicle has pulled over to the side of, or off, an active
9 roadway and has stopped in a location where it can safely remain stationary.

10 (2) "Hands free" means the manner in which a wireless handset is operated ~~for the purpose~~
11 ~~of composing, reading, or sending text messages~~ by using an internal feature or function, or through
12 an attachment or addition, including, but not limited to, an earpiece, headset, remote microphone,
13 or short-range wireless connection, thereby allowing the user to operate said device without the use
14 of hands, except to activate, deactivate, or initiate a feature or function thereof.

15 (3) "Inoperability" means a motor vehicle that is incapable of being operated or being
16 operated in a safe and prudent manner due to mechanical failure, including, but not limited to,
17 engine overheating or tire failure.

18 (4) "Motor vehicle" means any vehicle that is self-propelled by a motor, including, but not
19 limited to: automobiles, trucks, vans, construction vehicles, etc.

1 (5) "Person" means any natural person, corporation, unincorporated association, firm,
2 partnership, joint venture, joint stock association, or other entity or business organization of any
3 kind.

4 (6) "Personal wireless communication device" means a hand-held device through which
5 personal wireless services (commercial mobile services, unlicensed wireless services, and common
6 carrier wireless exchange access services) are transmitted, but does not include a global navigation
7 satellite receiver used for positioning, emergency notification, or navigation purposes.

8 (7) "Stopped" means not in motion.

9 (8) "Text message," also referred to as short messaging service (SMS), means the process
10 by which users send, read, or receive messages on a wireless handset, including text messages,
11 instant messages, electronic messages, or e-mails, in order to communicate with any person or
12 device.

13 (9) ~~"Use" means to operate a wireless handset or a personal wireless communication device~~
14 ~~in a manner not consistent with hands free operation.~~

15 (10) "Wireless handset" means a portable electronic or computing device, including
16 ~~cellular telephones~~ mobile devices and personal digital assistants (PDAs), capable of transmitting
17 data ~~in the form of a text message.~~

18 (b) No person shall use a wireless handset or personal wireless communication device to
19 compose, read, or send text messages, or for any other purpose while driving a motor vehicle on
20 any public street or public highway within the state of Rhode Island. except for:

21 ~~(e) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (b), this section shall not be construed to~~
22 ~~prohibit the use of any wireless handset or personal wireless communication device by:~~

23 (1) Any law enforcement, public safety or police officers, emergency services officials,
24 first aid, emergency medical technicians and personnel, and fire safety officials in the performance
25 of duties arising out of, and in the course of, their employment as such;

26 (2) A person using a wireless handset to contact an individual listed in subsection ~~(e)~~(b)(1);

27 (3) A person using a wireless handset or personal wireless communication device inside a
28 motor vehicle while such motor vehicle is parked, standing, or stopped and is removed from the
29 flow of traffic, in accordance with applicable laws, rules, or ordinances, or is stopped due to the
30 inoperability of such motor vehicle; ~~or~~

31 (4) A person activating, viewing, or deactivating a global positioning or navigation device
32 or a global positioning or navigation application. while the handset is mounted or otherwise affixed
33 to the vehicle to allow for hands-free operation; or

34 (5) The use of a personal wireless communication device in a hands-free manner, with a

1 hands-free accessory, or with the activation or deactivation of a feature or function of the personal
2 wireless communication device with the motion of a single swipe or tap of the finger of the driver.

3 ~~(c)~~(c) Nothing in this section shall be construed to prohibit a person driving a motor vehicle
4 from utilizing a hands-free wireless handset.

5 The nonemergency use by pilot/escort vehicle drivers of portable electronic devices is
6 prohibited.

7 ~~(d)~~(d) Any person who violates any of the provisions of this section shall, upon conviction,
8 be subject to a fine of one hundred dollars (\$100), or a license suspension for up to thirty (30) days,
9 or both; for a second conviction a person shall be subject to a fine of one hundred fifty dollars
10 (\$150), or a license suspension for up to three (3) months, or both; and for a third or subsequent
11 conviction a person shall be subject to a fine of two hundred fifty dollars (\$250), or a license
12 suspension for up to six (6) months, or both. All violations ~~arising out~~ of this section shall be heard
13 in the Rhode Island traffic tribunal.

14 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
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1 This act would provide an additional exception to the prohibition on the usage of a wireless
2 communication device while driving and clarify that the use of a wireless communication device
3 for the purpose of navigation must be while the device is mounted or otherwise affixed to the
4 vehicle and not held in the motorist's hand.

5 This act would take effect upon passage.

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