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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2021

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A N A C T

RELATING TO MOTOR AND OTHER VEHICLES -- MISCELLANEOUS RULES

Introduced By: Senator V. Susan Sosnowski

Date Introduced: March 18, 2021

Referred To: Senate Judiciary

(Judiciary)

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

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

3 **31-22-31. Mobile telephone usage by motor vehicle operators.**

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

5 (1) "Engage in a call" means talking into or listening on a hand-held personal wireless  
6 communication device, but does not include holding a hand-held personal wireless communication  
7 device to activate, deactivate, or initiate a function of such telephone.

8 (2) "Hands-free accessory" means an attachment, add-on, built-in feature, or addition to a  
9 personal wireless communication device, whether or not permanently installed in a motor vehicle,  
10 that, when used, allows the vehicle operator to maintain both hands on the steering wheel.

11 (3) "Hands-free personal wireless communication device" means a hand-held personal  
12 wireless communication device that has an internal feature or function, or that is equipped with an  
13 attachment or addition, whether or not permanently part of such hand-held personal wireless  
14 communication device, by which a user engages in a call without the use of either hand, whether  
15 or not the use of either hand is necessary to activate, deactivate, or initiate a function of such  
16 telephone.

17 (4) "Hand-held personal wireless communication device" means a personal wireless  
18 communication device with which a user engages in a call using at least one hand.

19 (5) "Immediate proximity" means the distance that permits the operator of a hand-held

1 personal wireless communication device to hear telecommunications transmitted over such hand-  
2 held personal wireless communication device, but does not require physical contact with such  
3 operator's ear.

4 (6) "Mobile telephone" means a personal wireless communication device, analog, wireless,  
5 or digital telephone capable of sending or receiving telephone communication without an access  
6 line for service.

7 (7) "Public utility" means a business that provides electricity, natural gas, water, and  
8 communications and other information services to residential and commercial customers.

9 (8) "Using" or "use" means holding a hand-held personal wireless communication device  
10 to, or in the immediate proximity of, the user's ear.

11 (b)(1) Except as otherwise provided in this section, no person shall operate a motor vehicle  
12 while using a hand-held personal wireless communication device to engage in a call while such  
13 vehicle is in motion.

14 (2) An operator of a motor vehicle who holds a hand-held personal wireless communication  
15 device to, or in the immediate proximity of, the operator's ear while such vehicle is in motion is  
16 presumed to be engaging in a call within the meaning of this section. The presumption established  
17 by this subdivision is rebuttable by evidence tending to show that the operator was not engaged in  
18 a call.

19 (3) The provisions of this section shall not be construed as authorizing the seizure or  
20 forfeiture of a hand-held personal wireless communication device, unless otherwise provided by  
21 law.

22 (4) Subsection (b)(1) of this section shall not apply to:

23 (i) The use of a hand-held personal wireless communication device for the sole purpose of  
24 communicating with any of the following regarding an emergency situation: an emergency  
25 response operator; a hospital, physician's office or health clinic; an ambulance company; a fire  
26 department; a police department; or a public utility; or

27 (ii) Any of the following persons while in the performance of their official duties and within  
28 the scope of their employment: a peace officer, as defined in § 12-7-21, a firefighter or an operator  
29 of an ambulance or authorized emergency vehicle, or the operator of a taxi cab, tow truck, or bus  
30 without passengers; or employees or agents of a public utility; or

31 (iii) The use of a hands-free personal wireless communication device.

32 (c) Any person who violates the provisions of subsection (b)(1) of this section shall be  
33 fined not more than one hundred dollars (\$100); ~~except that~~ [provided, however, until September 1,](#)  
34 [2021,](#) the fine shall be suspended for a first-time violator who provides proof of acquisition of a

1 hands-free accessory subsequent to the violation, but prior to the imposition of a fine.

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

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
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1           This act would sunset the provision which allows first-time violators to avoid the fine by  
2 presenting proof of acquisition of a hands-free device prior to the imposition of the fine effective  
3 September 1, 2021.

4           This act would take effect upon passage.

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