

Remarks prepared for
David Strickland, Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
For the
American Driver and Traffic Safety Education
Association
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Good morning. It's a pleasure to be here. Thank you Allen (Robinson) for your warm welcome. And thank you, ADTSEA, for the invitation to join in this discussion.

There is an inordinate amount of effort involved in preparing new drivers to “Drive Safely on the Road of Life.” It takes more than one person, more than one organization—it takes collaboration and shared expertise. For many years, NHTSA and ADTSEA have collaborated on this issue. That hard work during the course of our long-time partnership has resulted in the development of several

important driver education products.

For example, NHTSA and ADTSEA developed, together, the ADTSEA model curriculum standards and the model curriculum. We have supported ADTSEA in upgrading these products, and continue to do so even as we speak.

ADTSEA has also produced, with our help, a national overview of driver education and a national overview of non-traditional driver education programs sponsored by various national organizations.

ADTSEA produced a series of two-page fact sheets – driving tips – for us, which are available on the NHTSA website. So, thank you ADTSEA for this important partnership.

As with any program or project, there are those who shine a bit brighter and work just that much harder to blaze a trail. There are many people from the driver education community who have played significant roles in helping develop the recent national administrative standards. I'd like to

recognize three of those folks, right now. Without their work, our own effort would be that much more difficult today.

I'd like to recognize John Harvey (OR), who tragically passed away two years ago. Mr. Harvey was a long-time NHTSA partner and a giant in the profession. The National Standards are dedicated to him and we miss his presence here today as a past ADTSEA president.

I'd like to recognize David Huff, who just last month retired as driver education administrator in

Montana and president of the Driver Education and Training Administrators. David played a critical role in the establishment of the National Standards and received a Lifesavers Award last spring for this work. I met David and his family during the award presentation and can testify to his abiding commitment to the improvement of driver education. I know he would have loved being here today.

Allen Robinson, our panel moderator, has also been a giant in the field. I'd like to recognize his long-time leadership of this

organization and his long-time partnership with NHTSA. I appreciate all you have done to help NHTSA produce guiding documents to serve as a model for driver education.

Driver education is a challenging field, and every year you have a brand new crop of driver-wannabes ready to get behind the wheel of a vehicle. This is an alarming fact because teen drivers have the highest crash rate per mile driven of any age group. What's worse, research indicates that immaturity and inexperience are two of the main contributing factors for the

high novice teen driver crash rate. Experience, or lack of experience, has been linked to crashes regardless of the age at which driving starts. Immaturity can lead teens to speed, drive recklessly in high risk situations, and succumb to peer pressure. Inexperience can be especially problematic in difficult driving situations and when there are heightened distractions.

And in this modern era of portable technology, we all have a new risk to our safety to contend with – distracted driving. And the age group with the greatest proportion of distracted drivers was the under-

20 age group – 16 percent of all drivers younger than 20 involved in fatal crashes were reported to have been distracted while driving.

Today's teens and tweens' use of mobile devices are the lifeblood of that generation's entire social experience. You know it, I know it, and we have to address this. This group demands to be connected at all times, and seemingly at all costs. Under Secretary LaHood's leadership, we are engaging them in a conversation about safety and distraction behind the wheel of a vehicle.

As you know, we at DOT have elevated the issue to the national level and we are working hard to find solutions to end distracted driving. I am pleased to tell you that just last week, in Syracuse, New York, Secretary LaHood shared the highly-anticipated results of our study showing that high visibility enforcement coupled with public education campaigns can dramatically reduce cell phone related distracted driving.

In April of last year, we launched two distracted driving enforcement programs in the communities of Harford, Connecticut, and

Syracuse, New York – two states with laws against texting and handheld cell phone use while driving – to see if stepped-up enforcement would be effective in stopping this dangerous behavior behind the wheel.

The one-year study showed the rate of electronic device use while driving dropped significantly in both pilot programs. In Syracuse, both handheld phone use and texting declined by a third.

Hartford – where researchers initially identified drivers talking on their cell phones with twice the frequency – **and there was more**

room for improvement – showed an even more impressive 57 percent drop in handheld phone use and a stunning 72 percent drop in texting behind the wheel.

The pilot programs show that our safety recipe works. Strong laws, strong enforcement, and ongoing public awareness made a noticeable difference in these communities. These successful programs have laid the foundation for continued enforcement of these laws in Syracuse and Hartford. Combined with increased public support and awareness, it's our hope that these

pilot programs will have a lasting impact.

Now we'll take this program to the statewide level to test its effectiveness as a possible blueprint for safety across the country.

We've also partnered with Disney and Pixar to create an ad using popular characters from their upcoming release, [Cars 2](#). Called "Only the bad guys drive distracted," this terrific 30-second spot advises viewers, "No calling, no texting, nothing that can take away your focus."

As Driver Educators, you all know too well the dangers you try to prepare your drivers to handle; which of course, brings us to the starting gate of every driver's license: Driver Education.

Driver education has existed in the United States for almost 100 years, and the public has come to accept driver education as a primary method for teaching the “rules of the road” and basic driving skills to new drivers.

NHTSA supported the development of the national administrative

standards, completed a little over two years ago. Although NHTSA provided resources for this effort, the Standards belong to you. And we will continue to stand with you as we move toward greater state implementation of the national standards.

Another countermeasure for helping teens ease into the driver's seat is Graduated Driver Licensing, or GDL. GDL allows teens to learn to drive in less risky environments, gradually introducing more risky situations over time. GDL laws include a learner's permit period when driving is allowed only with a

parent or instructor. During the intermediate phase, teens may drive unsupervised but with nighttime restrictions to reduce late night driving, limitations on the number of passengers in the vehicle, and prohibitions against using any electronic communication device such as cell phones while driving. Full licensure is the last step.

As I said earlier, Driver Education is a challenging field, in large part because teen drivers have the highest crash rate per mile driven of any age group. They are immature and inexperienced and thanks to

modern technology, now they are distracted as well.

I can tell you, however, that under the leadership of Secretary LaHood, the Department of Transportation continues to be laser-focused on safety. We will continue our broad range of programs to make safer vehicles and change risky driver behaviors. We will remind parents, again and again, that the first line of defense is the family. Each one of us taking responsibility for ourselves and our loved ones, and that includes putting our children in car seats, buckling up and taking the

keys away from a loved one that has had too much to drink.

We will also remind parents that ... we have to set standards for safe driving, especially for our teens, and we must make those standards stick. As driver educators, you help us spread that message early on.

As the unsung heroes of road safety, you lay the foundation for shaping tomorrow's drivers. Through education, and probably more than a few white-knuckled moments in the vehicles, you help shape and protect the drivers who are at most

**risk, the teenagers, and help them to
make better choices when behind
the wheel.**

Thank you.

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