
DIGEST

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HB 580 Reengrossed

2023 Regular Session

Huval

Abstract: Prohibits the use of a wireless telecommunications device while operating a motor vehicle, provides for exceptions and penalties for such use, and provides for enforcement of proposed law.

Present law prohibits the use of wireless telecommunications devices in school zones.

Proposed law prohibits the use of certain wireless telecommunications devices while operating a motor vehicle to expand the prohibition against the use of wireless telecommunication devices while operating a motor vehicle in school zones to the general operation of a motor vehicle.

Present law defines the term "engage in a call" as talking or listening on a wireless telecommunications device.

Proposed law modifies the definition of "engage in a call" in present law to include talking or listening during a voice transmission on a wireless telecommunications device or manually entering names or phone numbers to initiate a call, except when using a hands-free wireless device.

Present law defines "wireless telecommunications device" and prohibits the definition from including any device or component that is permanently affixed to a motor vehicle, a hands free wireless telephone, an electronic communication device used hands-free, citizen band radios, citizen band radio hybrids, commercial two-way radio communication devices, two radio transmitters or receivers used by licensees of the Federal Communication Commission in the Amateur Radio Service, or electronic communication devices with push-to-talk functions.

Proposed law modifies the definition of "wireless telecommunications device" in present law by also excluding any other electronic device or any other substantially similar portable wireless device used to create, edit, post, or view video, photographs, or other images.

Proposed law modifies present law by removing a hands-free wireless telephone from the exclusion.

Present law defines the term "write, send, or read a text-based communication" as using a wireless telecommunications device to manually communicate with any person by text-based communication including but not limited to a text message, instant message, or electronic mail.

Proposed law modifies present law by defining the term "write, send, or read a text-based communication" to include other text-based applications used to manually communicate with any person and removes the use of a wireless telecommunications device to manually communicate with any person by text-based communication.

Present law specifies that operating a wireless telecommunications device includes engaging in a call; writing, sending, or reading a text-based communication; and accessing, reading, or posting to a social networking site.

Proposed law adds to present law accessing, viewing, posting, editing, or creating a video, photograph, or other image; accessing, reading, viewing, composing, browsing, transmitting, saving, or retrieving electronic data from any application or other media; using any application or feature of such a device by making manual entries of letters, numbers, symbols, or any combination thereof; and holding or physically supporting a wireless telecommunications device in either or both hands or with any part of the body, except for an earpiece, headphone device, or a wrist device to talk or listen during a voice transmission.

Proposed law provides exceptions for operating a wireless telecommunications device while operating a motor vehicle upon any public road or highway for law enforcement officers and firefighters.

Present law provides exceptions for operating a wireless telecommunications device while operating a motor vehicle upon any public road or highway for a person who uses a wireless telecommunications device: to report a traffic collision, medical emergency, or serious road hazard; to report a situation in which the person believes his personal safety is in jeopardy; to report or avert the perpetration or potential perpetration of a criminal act against the driver or another person; or while the motor vehicle is parked.

Proposed law modifies the exception in present law by specifying that it applies to a person using a wireless telecommunications device: to report other emergencies; to report a situation in which the person believes that an individual is in jeopardy of serious injury or death; to relay information between a transit or for-hire operator, including a transportation network company driver, and that operator's dispatcher, in which the device is affixed to the vehicle; to view data or images to navigate using a hands-free global positioning system; and to operate a device for a purpose other than texting or accessing social media while the motor vehicle is lawfully stationary and not in violation of any other law.

Proposed law removes the exceptions for a person using a wireless telecommunications device to: report a situation in which the person believes their personal safety is in jeopardy or to report or avert the perpetration or potential perpetration of a criminal act against the driver or another person.

Present law requires the first violation be punishable by a fine of not more than \$500. Further requires each subsequent violation be punishable by a fine of not more than \$1000 and a 60-day suspension of the operator's driver's license. Proposed law repeals present law and provides that each violation be punishable by a fine of not more than \$100.

Present law requires a person involved in a collision at the time of the violation to be fined double the amount of the fine imposed pursuant to proposed law. Present law requires the law enforcement officer investigating the collision to indicate on a written report that the person was using a wireless telecommunications device at the time of the collision

Proposed law modifies the double fine imposed in present law to be designated for the operator of a motor vehicle involved in a crash at the time of the violation.

Proposed law requires law enforcement officers to issue a written warning for any violation occurring before Jan. 1, 2024.

Present law requires use of a wireless telecommunications device for any purpose provided in present law be an affirmative defense and authorizes the operator of a motor vehicle to produce documentary or other evidence in support of this defense. Proposed law modifies present law to only allow enumerated exceptions (first responders, concerned citizens, navigation, and stationary).

Proposed law requires a law enforcement officer who stops an operator of a motor vehicle for a violation to inform the operator of the vehicle of his right to decline a search of his wireless telecommunications device. Proposed law prohibits the law enforcement officer during a stop from accessing the device without a warrant; confiscating the device while waiting on the warrant to access; obtaining consent from the operator of the vehicle through coercion or other improper methods; or making a custodial arrest except in situations where a warrant was issued for failure to appear for a felony or state misdemeanor charge in court when summoned.

Proposed law requires probable cause for a violation of proposed law be based solely on the law enforcement officer's clear and unobstructed view of a person's use of a wireless telecommunications device. Prohibits a law enforcement officer from searching or inspecting a motor vehicle, its contents, the driver, or a passenger solely because of a violation of proposed law.

Present law specifies that the provisions of present law only apply within a school zone upon a public road or highway during posted hours when signs are located in a visible manner in each direction that indicate the use of a hand-held wireless telecommunications device is prohibited while operating a motor vehicle.

Proposed law repeals present law and makes prohibitions applicable to intrastate travel subject to enumerated exceptions.

(Amends R.S. 32:300.5; Repeals R.S. 32:300.6, 300.7, and 300.8)

Summary of Amendments Adopted by House

The Committee Amendments Proposed by House Committee on Transportation, Highways and Public Works to the original bill:

1. Clarify that the intent of proposed law is to prohibit the use of certain wireless

telecommunications devices while generally operating a motor vehicle, instead of just in school zones.

2. Remove school zones from the use of wireless telecommunications prohibited exceptions.
3. Add delivery drivers to the exception provision applicable to persons using wireless telecommunications devices.
4. Clarify that operating a wireless telecommunications device while stationary is permissible.
5. Reduce the fine associated with violations of present and proposed law as follows:
 - (a) First violation- reduced from \$500 to not more than \$100 but not less than \$50.
 - (b) Second violation- reduced from not more than \$1000 to not more than \$100.
 - (c) Third/subsequent violations- reduced from not more than \$300 to not more than \$100.
6. Remove community service which consisted of up to 15 hours for a first violation and up to 30 hours for a second violation. Also, remove the 30 hour community service requirement for third or subsequent violations along with the suspension of the person's driver's license.
7. Make technical changes.

The Committee Amendments Proposed by House Committee on Appropriations to the engrossed bill:

1. Standardize references throughout the bill to "wireless telecommunications device".
2. Delete duplicative language prohibiting inspection of a motor vehicle solely for violation of proposed law.
3. Delete provision requiring law enforcement to record the race and ethnicity of any violator of proposed law.
4. Delete provision requiring all law enforcement agencies to maintain and report certain information to the Dept. of Public Safety and Corrections (DPS&C) and requiring annual report by DPS&C of such data to the governor and legislature.
5. Make technical and conforming changes.