



December 10, 2012

Members of Lee County Legislative Delegation:

BikeWalkLee, a coalition working to complete Lee County's streets, urges you to take action this legislative session to address the growing problem of distracted driving, especially texting while driving. Vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, bicyclists and motorcyclists are most at risk from distracted drivers.

This is the third year in a row that we have urged the Florida Legislature to take long-overdue action to pass legislation that bans texting while driving. While our state elected officials ignore this serious public safety problem, Florida's traffic fatalities are up 4% for the first quarter of 2012 as compared to that period last year -- and in Lee County, fatal crashes more than doubled for the first quarter. Equally disturbing, the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (DHSMV) just released the 2011 Florida Traffic Crash Statistics Report, which showed that bicyclist fatalities increased statewide between 2010 and 2011 by almost 58% -- while Lee County's bicyclist fatality rate was 27% higher than the Florida statewide rate in 2011! Motorcyclist fatalities increased during this period by 18%. According to DHSMV, drivers were distracted in 43% of Florida's fatal crashes. Florida was already one of the deadliest states in the country for vulnerable road users, and these new statistics show that poor performance is getting even worse.

Without action by our Legislature, Florida's roads will become even more deadly. U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood has led a national campaign to ban texting while driving and other deadly distractions, and 39 states have taken action to ban texting while driving. Sadly, Florida is not one of them. Governor Rick Scott and officials of his administration have stated numerous times that roadway safety is their No. 1 transportation priority. If the governor is serious about safety, he must demand that the Legislature put a bill on his desk for signature before it adjourns the upcoming session.

How many more people will have to die from distracted driving before our elected representatives understand that legislative action is needed to save lives? What's at stake here is the safety of our citizens—motorists as well as pedestrians, bicyclists and motorcyclists.

There are several ways the legislature could address this issue, from a legislative ban on texting while driving to a revision in the existing Careless Driving statute. The latter approach would address all distractions that impair the drivers' ability to control their vehicle. Regardless of the approach taken, it's important that these provisions have teeth and are enforceable.

In a perfect world, it wouldn't take a law to make people do the smart thing. But this world isn't perfect and, when one person's actions endanger others, lawmakers must support public safety and give law enforcement personnel the tools they need to keep roads safe and keep distracted drivers from putting themselves and others at risk.

We urge you to enact legislation this legislative session. We look forward to working with you to make our roadways safer for all users.

Darla

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