

New Jersey Lawmakers May Ban Texting While Driving

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New Jersey drivers who insist on sending text messages on their cell phones or personal digital assistants may find themselves on the wrong side of the law if legislators approve a new bill.

The plan is in response to a recent Nationwide Insurance survey finding that one in five drivers are texting while driving, a figure that rises to about one in three among people aged 18 to 34, said Democratic Assemblyman Paul Moriarty.

"It's extremely dangerous," said Moriarty, one of three sponsors of the bill. "It requires you to completely take your eyes off the road. I see people driving down the street using both their thumbs to send a text message, and I can only imagine they are steering with their knees."

Drivers caught texting would be fined between \$100 and \$250. Similar measures are being considered by three other states, Moriarty said.

The measure would allow police to pull over any driver found texting while driving, a tougher approach than currently allowed under the state's ban on drivers using a mobile phone on the highway. Under that law police are only allowed to stop drivers if they are also committing another offense.

Critics have asked why the bill does not also seek to outlaw other sources of driver-distraction such as coffee or food, but Moriarty said such a bill would never pass the state legislature.

The bill, introduced last week, has 20 co-sponsors - both Democrats and Republicans. It is expected to be debated in a committee during May or June and then pass to the full Assembly and the Senate whose leaders have indicated they are in favor, the assemblyman said.

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