

HOUSE BILL 9

AN ACT TO MAKE IT UNLAWFUL TO USE A MOBILE TELEPHONE FOR E-MAIL OR TEXT MESSAGING WHILE OPERATING A VEHICLE ON A PUBLIC STREET OR HIGHWAY OR PUBLIC VEHICULAR AREA.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 2. Chapter 20 of the General Statutes is amended by adding a new section to read:

"§ 20-137.4A. Unlawful use of mobile telephone for text messaging or electronic mail.

(a) Offense. - It shall be unlawful for any person to operate a vehicle on a public street or highway or public vehicular area while using a mobile telephone to:

- (1) Manually enter multiple letters or text in the device as a means of communicating with another person; or
- (2) Read any electronic mail or text message transmitted to the device or stored within the device, provided that this prohibition shall* not apply to any name or number stored in the device nor to any caller identification information.

(b) Exceptions. - The provisions of this section shall not apply to:

- (1) The operator of a vehicle that is lawfully parked or stopped.
- (2) Any of the following while in the performance of their official duties:* a law enforcement officer; a member of a fire department; or the operator of a public or private ambulance.
- (3) The use of factory-installed or aftermarket global positioning systems (GPS) or wireless communications devices used to transmit or receive data as part of a digital dispatch system.

(4) The use of voice operated technology.

(c) Penalty. - A violation of this section while operating a school bus, as defined in

G.S. 20-137.4(a)(4), shall be a Class 2 misdemeanor and shall be punishable by a fine of not less than one hundred dollars (\$100.00). Any other violation of this section shall be an infraction and shall be punishable by a fine of one hundred dollars (\$100.00) and the costs of court.

No drivers license points or insurance surcharge shall be assessed as a result of a violation of this section. Failure to comply with the provisions of this section shall not constitute negligence per se or contributory negligence per se by the operator in any action for the recovery of damages arising out of the operation, ownership, or maintenance of a vehicle."

SECTION 3. The Joint Legislative Transportation Oversight Committee shall identify and study the leading causes of driver inattention or distraction, the risks posed by driver inattention or distraction, and any methods that might be used to manage those driver distractions and promote highway safety. The Committee shall report its findings and recommendations, including any proposed legislation, to the General Assembly by April 15, 2010.

SECTION 4. This act becomes effective December 1, 2009, and applies to offenses committed on or after that date.

In the General Assembly read three times and ratified this the 10th day of June, 2009.