**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND THE CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1976, SO AS TO ENACT THE “SOUTH CAROLINA HANDS‑FREE ACT”; TO AMEND SECTION 56‑5‑3890, RELATING TO THE UNLAWFUL USE OF A WIRELESS TELECOMMUNICATIONS DEVICE WHILE OPERATING A MOTOR VEHICLE, SO AS TO DELETE CERTAIN TERMS, DEFINE NEW TERMS, REVISE THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHEN IT IS UNLAWFUL TO OPERATE A MOTOR VEHICLE WHILE USING A WIRELESS TELECOMMUNICATIONS DEVICE, AND REVISE THE PENALTY FOR A VIOLATION OF THIS PROVISION AND THE ALLOCATION OF THE FINES COLLECTED; TO AMEND SECTION 56‑1‑720, RELATING TO POINTS ASSESSED AGAINST A PERSON’S MOTOR VEHICLE RECORD FOR COMMITTING CERTAIN VIOLATIONS, SO AS TO PROVIDE DISTRACTED DRIVING IS A TWO‑POINT VIOLATION; AND TO PROVIDE THAT AT CERTAIN POINTS ALONG THE STATE’S INTERSTATE HIGHWAYS, THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION SHALL NOTIFY MOTORISTS OF THE PROVISIONS OF THIS ACT.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina:

SECTION 1. This act may be referred to and cited as the “South Carolina Hands‑Free Act”.

SECTION 2. Section 56‑5‑3890 of the 1976 Code is amended to read:

“Section 56‑5‑3890. (A) For purposes of this section:

(1) ~~‘Hands‑free wireless electronic communication device’ means an electronic device, including, but not limited to, a telephone, a personal digital assistant, a text‑messaging device, or a computer, which allows a person to wirelessly communicate with another person without holding the device in either hand by utilizing an internal feature or function of the device, an attachment, or an additional device. A hands‑free wireless electronic communication device may require the use of either hand to activate or deactivate an internal feature or function of the device~~ ‘Stand‑alone electronic device’ means a device other than a wireless telecommunications device which stores audio or video data files to be retrieved on demand by a user.

(2) ‘Text‑based communication’ means a communication using text‑based information, including, but not limited to, a text message, an SMS message, an instant message, or an electronic mail message.

(3) ~~‘Wireless electronic communication device’ means an electronic device, including, but not limited to, a telephone, a personal digital assistant, a text‑messaging device, or a computer, which allows a person to wirelessly communicate with another person~~ ‘Wireless telecommunications device’ means a cellular telephone, a portable telephone, a text‑messaging device, a personal digital assistant, a stand‑alone computer, a global positioning system receiver, or a substantially similar portable wireless device that is used to initiate or receive communication, information, or data. This term shall not include a radio, citizens band radio, citizens band radio hybrid, commercial two‑way radio communication device, or its functional equivalent, subscription‑based emergency communication device, prescribed medical device, amateur or ham radio device, or in‑vehicle security, navigation, or remote diagnostics system.

(B) ~~It is unlawful for a person to use a wireless electronic communication device to compose, send, or read a text‑based communication while operating a motor vehicle on the public streets and highways of this State.~~ While operating a motor vehicle on any highway of this State, a person shall not:

(1) physically hold a:

(a) wireless telecommunications device, provided that this exclusion shall not prohibit the use of an earpiece, headphone device, or device worn on a wrist to conduct a voice‑based communication; or

(b) stand‑alone electronic device;

(2) write, send, or read any text‑based communication, including, but not limited to, a text message, instant message, email, or Internet data on a wireless telecommunications device or stand‑alone electronic device. However, this prohibition shall not apply to a voice‑based communication which is automatically converted by the device to be sent as a message in a written form;

(3) watch a video or movie on a wireless telecommunications device or stand‑alone electronic device other than watching data related to the navigation of the vehicle.

(C) This section does not apply to a person who is:

(1) lawfully parked ~~or stopped~~;

(2) using a hands‑free wireless electronic communication device;

(3) using a single button on a wireless telecommunications device to initiate or terminate a voice communication;

(4) summoning emergency assistance;

~~(4)~~(5) transmitting or receiving data as part of a digital dispatch system;

~~(5)~~(6) a public safety official, similar first responder, or tow truck operator while in the performance of the person’s official duties; ~~or~~

~~(6)~~ ~~using a global positioning system device or an internal global positioning system feature or function of a wireless electronic communication device for the purpose of navigation or obtaining related traffic and road condition information~~

(7) using equipment or services installed or provided by the original manufacturer of the vehicle. However, this item does not authorize the driver’s use of a hand‑held communication device; or

(8) a driver of a commercial motor vehicle that is otherwise regulated by federal law.

(D)(1) A person who is adjudicated to be in violation of the provisions of this section is guilty of distracted driving and, upon conviction, must be fined not more than ~~twenty‑five~~ five hundred dollars, no part of which may be suspended and must have two points assessed against his motor vehicle operating record. ~~No court costs, assessments, or surcharges may be assessed against a person who violates a provision of this section. A person must not be fined more than fifty dollars for any one incident of one or more violations of the provisions of this section. A custodial arrest for a violation of this section must not be made, except upon a warrant issued for failure to appear in court when summoned or for failure to pay an imposed fine. A violation of this section does not constitute a criminal offense. Notwithstanding Section 56‑1‑640, a violation of this section must not be:~~

~~(a)~~ ~~included in the offender’s motor vehicle records maintained by the Department of Motor Vehicles or in the criminal records maintained by SLED; or~~

~~(b)~~ ~~reported to the offender’s motor vehicle insurer.~~

(2) During the first ~~one hundred eighty~~ ~~days~~ six months after this section’s effective date, law enforcement officers shall issue only warnings for violations of this section.

(3) The Department of Public Safety shall receive twenty‑five dollars of the fine for a distracted driving offense. The department must use the fines to conduct public awareness campaigns and activities to educate the public on the hands‑free requirements and the dangers of distracted driving.

(E) A law enforcement officer shall not:

(1) stop a person for a violation of this section except when the officer has probable cause that a violation has occurred ~~based on the officer’s clear and unobstructed view of a person who is using a wireless electronic communication device to compose, send, or read a text‑based communication while operating a motor vehicle on the public streets and highways of this State~~;

(2) seize, search, view, or require the forfeiture of a wireless electronic communication device because of a violation of this section;

(3) search or request to search a motor vehicle, driver, or passenger in a motor vehicle, solely because of a violation of this section; or

(4) make a custodial arrest for a violation of this section, except upon a warrant issued for failure to appear in court when summoned or for failure to pay an imposed fine.

(F) The Department of Public Safety shall maintain statistical information regarding citations issued pursuant to this section.

(G) This section preempts local ordinances, regulations, and resolutions adopted by municipalities, counties, and other local governmental entities regarding persons using wireless ~~electronic communication devices while operating motor vehicles on the public streets and highways of this State~~ telecommunications devices and stand‑alone electronic devices while operating a motor vehicle on the public highways of this State.”

SECTION 3. Section 56‑1‑720 of the 1976 Code is amended to read:

“Section 56‑1‑720. There is established a point system for the evaluation of the operating record of persons to whom a license to operate motor vehicles has been granted and for the determination of the continuing qualifications of these persons for the privileges granted by the license to operate motor vehicles. The system shall have as its basic element a graduated scale of points assigning relative values to the various violations in accordance with the following schedule:

VIOLATION POINTS

Reckless driving 6

Passing stopped school bus 6

Hit‑and‑run, property damages only 6

Driving too fast for conditions, or speeding:

(1) No more than 10 m.p.h. above the posted limits 2

(2) More than 10 m.p.h. but less than 25

m.p.h. above the posted limits 4

(3) 25 m.p.h. or above the posted limits 6

Disobedience of any official traffic control device 4

Disobedience to officer directing traffic 4

Failing to yield right‑of‑way 4

Driving on wrong side of road 4

Passing unlawfully 4

Turning unlawfully 4

Driving through or within safety zone 4

Shifting lanes without safety precaution 2

Improper dangerous parking 2

Following too closely 4

Failing to dim lights 2

Operating with improper lights 2

Operating with improper brakes 4

Distracted Driving 2

Operating a vehicle in unsafe condition 2

Driving in improper lane 2

Improper backing 2

Endangerment of a highway worker, no injury 2

Endangerment of a highway worker, injury results 4”

SECTION 4. At every interstate highway ingress into the State, the South Carolina Department of Transportation shall erect a visible notification sign advising motorists entering the State of the existence of this act.

SECTION 5. The repeal or amendment by this act of any law, whether temporary or permanent or civil or criminal, does not affect pending actions, rights, duties, or liabilities founded thereon, or alter, discharge, release or extinguish any penalty, forfeiture, or liability incurred under the repealed or amended law, unless the repealed or amended provision shall so expressly provide. After the effective date of this act, all laws repealed or amended by this act must be taken and treated as remaining in full force and effect for the purpose of sustaining any pending or vested right, civil action, special proceeding, criminal prosecution, or appeal existing as of the effective date of this act, and for the enforcement of rights, duties, penalties, forfeitures, and liabilities as they stood under the repealed or amended laws.

SECTION 6. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

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