

May 15, 2017

To: Senate Judiciary Committee

From: Michael Eastman, License Trustee
Lincoln County Amateur Radio Club

Re: Testimony about HB 2597 (SB2)

I am writing this letter on behalf of the Lincoln County Amateur Radio Club. We have about 100 members and are very concerned about HB 2597 in its current form. HB 2597 amends ORS 811.507, removing several specific exemptions from the definition of the distracted driving offense.

We recognize there is a serious problem with using cell phones and tablets while driving – especially with texting and emailing. These multifunction devices require one to interact with the device to get the desired result which is to make a phone call or send out a text or email. To accomplish these tasks, the operator must look at the phone or tablet and is not watching the road.

Amateur radio has been around for many, many years and has never, ever been identified as a cause of distracted driving or automobile accidents by either the Dept. of Transportation or the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. A simple Google search will verify this. Research indicates talking and looking ahead to the road is not a problem, the problem comes in when people look at their devices to send text messages, read emails, etc. Amateur radio does not require one's eyes to look up or down or anyplace but the road ahead. The reason is simple, you do not need to take your eyes off the road to pick up a mic and press the talk button. Talking involves quick information exchanges. Only one person can speak at a time so chatting or extended calls are not suitable or utilized by amateur radio operators. Most of what we do with our radios is listen because the main reason we have the radios in the first place is to provide emergency communications in support of our community. There is no searching or surfing the net on amateur radio. Amateur radio is in no way comparable to cell phones and tablets as a source for distracted driving. Our eyes stay focused on the road. There is no reason to make utilizing a mic with amateur radio a crime.

Many of our club members volunteer for our county's emergency services department as part of our county's overall emergency preparation plan. Amateur radio operators are all tested and licensed by the FCC. Having radios in our vehicles is very important so that the equipment is always available when needed. We purchase the equipment ourselves. If we were no longer allowed to utilize our radios in our vehicles, there would be no reason for us to remain as emergency volunteers since our equipment would not be readily available when needed.

We urge you to have a more focused approach to the problem of distracted driving and not simply outlaw all electronic communication devices. Please amend the bill to exclude mobile VHF/HF radio use while operating a vehicle, if the user has an FCC license.

Thank you.