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KENNEDY PROPOSES ANTI-TEXTING WHILE DRIVING LAW

I'd like to take this opportunity to address the recent Local Law proposed by myself and Legislator Tim Wroblewski that prohibits text messaging while driving anywhere in Erie County. While this legislation is important to me as a policymaker and member of the Erie County Legislature Public Safety Committee, the driving force behind the proposed law is my role as a parent of two children.

Spurred by recent automobile fatalities in which texting was involved, and on the heels of a state bill that only lists texting while driving as a secondary offense, this law takes the proactive approach of classifying texting as a primary offense, one which warrants a traffic stop if observed by police or deputies.

Making text messaging while driving illegal and a primary offense in Erie County and across NY State is simply common sense. Think about it: while it is illegal to hold a phone up to your ear and talk while driving, the law as it stands today says it is not equally dangerous or illegal to hold an electronic device in your lap or hand, look down, find the keys to press, hit them, check and re-check sentences, and finally look back up to reorient yourself to the road...no matter the speed...no matter the traffic or time of day! It is absolutely absurd!

Erie County is not the only county in the state of New York to consider this tougher stance against texting while driving; other counties have already adopted such a law and Niagara County is currently considering a similar measure. It is important to note that this Local Law was introduced to fill a need that had been left by the state bill; however,

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if the state or federal government passes a law that engenders the same protections, the Erie County law will be supplanted.

As the law is implemented in Erie County, there will no doubt be a renewed focus on driver safety, particularly among the youth of Western New York, of whom too many have already perished at the hands of this dangerous practice. I am confident that the Erie County Legislature will adopt this law toughening the law against texting while driving, naturally serving as a deterrent to unsafe driving and promoting the overall safety of drivers, passengers, and other travelers on the road.

If even one life is saved, this law will have proven itself worthwhile.