



January 11th, 2024

Senator Wanggaard, Chair

Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety

Testimony on 2023 Senate Bill 830

Relating to: use of cellular telephones in school zones and providing a penalty.

Thank you, Chairman Wanggaard and other members of the committee, for hearing my testimony on Senate Bill 830 today. As we all know, school zones have some of the strictest speeding limits that we have to abide by. This ensures the safety of our students and school personnel during times of heavy pedestrian and automotive traffic. Unfortunately, however, speeding is not the only safety hazard we are experiencing in our school zones.

In 2021, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation recorded 10,219 distracted driving crashes statewide. The rise of technology has made it easier to become distracted by other things instead of keeping eyes on the road. More specifically, 59 crashes in 2021 had reported a school zone sign/device traffic control marker nearby. While we like to think that people take extra precaution in a school zone, sometimes it is just not the case.

Under current law, it is already prohibited for drivers to use their cell phones in a highway construction zone, unless the device is voice-operated, is hands-free, or you are using it to report an emergency. SB 830 would add school zones to that prohibition during school hours or when children are present. The penalties for not abiding by this legislation are as follows: no less than \$20 nor more than \$40 for the first offense and no less than \$50 nor more than \$100 for the 2nd or subsequent conviction within a year.

We take on a certain responsibility when we get behind the wheel. Ensuring that reckless decisions get properly penalized will hopefully help deter people from using their cell phones when they are driving, especially in a place where children are present. Thank you, and I will take any questions at this time.

Respectfully,

Senator Jesse James

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Senate Bill 830

Public Testimony

Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety

January 11, 2024

Thank you Chairman Wanggaard for the opportunity to testify today on Senate Bill 830. I would like to thank Representative Kitchens and Senators James and Hesselbein for joining me in authoring this bill.

Last summer before the 2023-2024 school year, a constituent of mine, Detective Joshua Rider from the Columbia County Sheriff's office, contacted me to ask that I introduce legislation to make our school zones safer. As you may know, in recent sessions the legislature has taken steps to protect emergency responders and construction workers by making those defined areas "hands free." Detective Rider felt that making our school zones "hands free" would better protect students from distracted drivers. School zones have an increased amount of vehicular traffic and pedestrian traffic, increasing the odds of a vehicle vs. pedestrian type crash. According to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) there were a total of 991 school zone crashes in 2022.

In communities across our state students travel to school in different ways. In my own district, many students of all ages walk to school. As a former educator, I am always supportive of ways to make our communities safer for students. Senate Bill 830 prohibits using a cell phone in a school zone during school hours or when children are present. Penalties include forfeiting a minimum of \$20 and maximum of \$40 for a first violation and a minimum of \$50 and maximum of \$100 for subsequent convictions within a year. I am proud to have been able to co-author this bi-partisan legislation to keep students safe.

I hope that members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety will support this important piece of legislation.



JOEL KITCHENS

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 1ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony for the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety
Senate Bill 830
April 4, 2023

Thank you, Chairman Wanggaard and members of the committee for holding this public hearing on Senate Bill 830.

Keeping students safe should be a priority for all of us across Wisconsin - including on their way to school. Unfortunately, our school zones are not as safe as they could be.

Sixty-percent of distracted driving crashes happen in urban areas. According to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, there were close to 1,000 school zone crashes in 2022. More than 100 of those crashes are the result of distracted driving in school zones which caused 40 injuries.

We already have a law on the books that bans drivers from using a cell phone in a highway construction zone. This bill will mirror that law for school zones.

Senate Bill 830 prohibits using a cell phone in a school zone during school hours or when children are present. The bill uses the same penalties for using a phone in a construction zone. I have talked to some of our local law enforcement officers and they are supportive of the bill.

Hopefully, this legislation will send a message to drivers to be more careful around schools and make sure students get to school and back home again safely.

I want to thank my co-authors Senator James and Representative Considine. Thank you members for your time and I hope you consider supporting Senate Bill 830.