**2019 U DRIVE. U TEXT. U PAY. CAMPAIGN**

**SAMPLE OP-ED**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: [Date]**

**CONTACT: [Name, Phone Number, E-mail Address]**

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**Keep Your Passengers—and Yourself—Safe In the Car:**

**Never Text and Drive**

***U Drive. U Text. U Pay.***

These days, it seems like everyone uses their cell phone all day for everything under the sun—from checking the weather and news, to catching up with family and friends, to scheduling appointments. We use our cell phones to check social media, order groceries, and listen to our favorite songs. But this constant cell phone use comes with a cost: Distraction.

According to NHTSA, between 2012-2017, nearly 20,000 people died in crashes involving a distracted driver. In fact, there were 3,166 people killed in motor vehicle crashes involving distracted drivers in 2017. That means that nearly one-tenth of all fatal crashes that year were reported as distraction-affected.

While we generally think of distracted driving as texting or talking on the cell phone, it can take many other forms: adjusting the GPS, applying makeup, eating, or even chatting with other passengers can distract a driver from the essential task at hand—safe driving. The bottom line is this: If your attention is anywhere other than the road, you’re driving distracted, and you’re driving dangerous.

The month of April is National Distracted Driving Awareness Month. **[Local/State Officials]** are spreading the word that the U.S. Department of Transportation’s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is teaming up with **[Local Law Enforcement Office]** for a high-visibility enforcement effort April 11 to April 15, 2019. Law enforcement officers will intensify their efforts to stop texting and other forms of distracted driving by issuing citations for distraction violations. The campaign*, U Drive. U Text. U Pay.*, aims to spread the message about the dangers of distracted driving, and to remind drivers of the consequences of their distracted actions.

Everyone knows that texting while driving is distracting and dangerous, but people often ignore the risks and do it anyway. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety’s analysis of 2009-2012 data found that while more than 80 percent of drivers believed it was completely unacceptable for a motorist to text behind the wheel, more than a third of those same drivers admitted to reading text messages while operating a passenger motor vehicle themselves.

Driving while distracted is more than just personally risky. When you text and drive, you become a danger to everyone on the road around you.

Over the years, millennials have become the biggest texting-while-driving offenders, using their cell phones to talk, text, and scroll through social media while behind the wheel. According to NHTSA, young drivers 16- to 24-years-old have been observed using handheld electronic devices while driving at higher rates than older drivers since 2007. In fact, in 2017, 8 percent of people killed in teen (15-19) driving crashes died when these teen drivers were distracted at the times of the crashes. And female drivers are most at-risk for being involved in a fatal crash involving a distracted driver.

**Drive Safe Every Trip**

Don’t want to get ticketed for distracted driving? Then don’t do it. If you’re driving, follow these steps:

* If you are expecting a text message or need to send one, pull over and park your car in a safe location. Once you are safely off the road and parked, it is safe to text.
* Designate your passenger as your “designated texter.” Allow them access to your phone to respond to calls or messages.
* Do not engage in social media scrolling or messaging while driving.
* Cell phone use can be habit-forming. Struggling to not text and drive? Put the cell phone in the trunk, glove box, or back seat of the vehicle until you arrive at your destination.

You should never be embarrassed to do the right thing. It’s more embarrassing—and costly—to have a law enforcement officer stop you and call you out for your dangerous behavior. And it is an absolute nightmare to be responsible for causing injury or death to another human being. Texting while driving is dangerous and illegal. Break the cycle. Remember: *U Drive. U Text. U Pay.*

For more information, visit [www.trafficsafetymarketing.gov](http://www.trafficsafetymarketing.gov).

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