**SAMPLE OP-ED**

**Put your phone away or get ready to pay.**

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There are many rules to remember when you get behind the wheel, like always wearing a seat belt, driving sober, and obeying the posted speed limit. There is one thing you should add to that list: never use your phone while you are behind the wheel.

There were 37,461 lives lost on America’s roadways in 2016, and almost 10 percent of those fatalities were distraction-related. When we think of distracted driving, the first thing that comes to mind is texting while behind the wheel; however, actions like putting on makeup or eating can be just as deadly. However, as a driver, your priority should only be the road in front of you.

That’s why high-visibility enforcement campaigns like *U Drive. U Text. U Pay* are so important. From April 12 to 16, 2018, law enforcement officers will have an increased presence on America’s roads, and will be on high alert to catch distracted drivers and enforce distracted-driving laws. Remember: *U Drive. U Text. U Pay.*

As a driver, it’s your responsibility to keep yourself, your passengers, and those around you safe on the road. The best way for you to protect everyone is to keep both hands on the wheel, and your eyes and concentration on the road - not an electronic device. If you need to send a text, ask your passenger to be your “designated texter,” or pull off in a safe location to use your phone. The consequences of distracted driving can be disastrous ***and*** cost you a pretty penny.

While the problem spans all age ranges, texting and driving has become an especially problematic trend among millennials. 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 2016, there were 3,450 people killed and 391,000 people injured because of this deadly behavior. Clearly, the consequences of texting while driving can be severe; however, prevention is simple. Start with your own behavior; don’t use your phone or anything else that can be distracting while behind the wheel. Spread the message. If you see someone distracted behind the wheel, share the statistics, dangers, and your concerns. The best messengers for teens are their peers, so encourage your teen to share the stats with their friends if they see them engaging in unsafe behavior. Tell everyone: *U Drive. U Text. U Pay.*

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