The law would not ban texting while in the car. The violation would be “texting while driving.” Drivers who wish to text while driving should pull off the road and text all they want.

By IKE MGBATOGU

Contributing Writer

COLUMBUS – In July, the Ohio House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed a bill to ban ‘texting while driving’ in Ohio.

It is now up to the Ohio Senate to make it happen. Will the senate go along?

Columbus City Councilmember Michelle Mills is certainly hoping so. She released a statement last week expressing support for the ban and hoping that the senate would “say yes” to House Bill 99.

Mills, who was one of the speakers at a rally held last week in front of the Statehouse to support the passage of the ban, is urging senate lawmakers to pass the bill and “help us save lives.”

“Text and driving is one of the most dangerous forms of distracted driving because it takes the driver’s hands off the wheel, eyes off the road and mind off the task at hand, safely operating a motor vehicle,” said Mills.

And safely operating a motor vehicle was precisely why State Representatives Nancy Garland and Rex Damshroder sponsored the bill, which was approved by a House vote of 88 to 10, garnering bipartisan support.

Ohio is trying to pass a law which is already in place in Columbus and in “at least 20 other municipalities” in the state. Mills spoke about why it was important for Columbus to move forward and pass the law.

“Knowing that the lives of our residents could be at risk, the Columbus City Council did not wait for the state to put a ‘texting while driving’ ban in place,” said Mills.

And she was right. In 2010, Council President Andrew Ginther, then a Councilmember, led the effort to ban “texting while driving” in the city. At the time, he expressed interest in working with the state to craft a uniform legislation but state officials said they were not ready.

So Columbus moved forward and passed its own “texting while driving” ban. Now Ohio is pushing to have one too and join 34 other states that have banned the dangerous practice.

The bill has been assigned to the Senate Highway and Transportation Committee and now awaits hearing. Bill's sponsor Garland, a speaker at the rally, called it "a no-brainer."

"Texting while driving is a major safety hazard that makes our roads unsafe for drivers, bikers and walkers," said Garland. "The numbers tell us this high-risk practice drastically increases the chance of accident, injury, and death for drivers who text and those around them."

And those numbers came from the National Transportation Safety Administration, a group that tracks and monitors road accidents across the country. It said that "texting while driving" is two times more dangerous than drinking and driving. And that the reaction time of drivers involved with "texting while driving" is "35 percent" slower than it is for someone who smoked marijuana and "12 percent" slower than it is for drunk drivers.

A more graphic illustration from the AAA foundation, whose spokesperson Kimberly Schwind was also at the rally, further underscores the perils of this.

The group reported that drivers who text and drive look away from the road by an average of 5 seconds, representing the time they spend typing, sending or reading text messages. That adds up to about the time it would take to travel the length of a football field.

If approved, violation of the law would be a minor misdemeanor to carry a maximum fine of $150. But it would be a primary offense, which would give cops the authority to stop and cite drivers just for that.

The law would not ban texting while in the car. The violation would be "texting while driving." Drivers who wish to text while driving should pull off the road and text all they want.

Others at the rally were Bexley Police Chief Larry Rinehart; Captain Guy Turner, City of Westlake Police Department, and Tina Yanssens, whose pedestrian father was killed by a texting driver.

Mgbatogu is a freelance writer and editor of Onumba.com based in Columbus. He can be reached by email at Onumbamedia@yahoo.com