



**Date: 12/27/2016**

**To: Helena City Commission members**

**From: Gary Spaeth, Chair, Helena Citizens' Council**

**Re: Concerns about cell phone use while driving in Helena**

In November 2011, the Helena City Commission adopted a city ordinance which bans drivers from using handheld cellphones or mobile electronic devices to text or call while operating a vehicle. Vehicles include cars, trucks, bicycles and scooters. Hands-free devices -- such as Bluetooth or speaker phones -- may be used. Hands-free devices must allow the driver to maintain both hands on the steering wheel while operating the vehicle in the roadway. The Helena Citizens' Council (HCC) applauds the Commission for adopting this ordinance. However, members remained concerned that cell phone use while driving was still occurring, despite the ban.

This past summer, a team of HCC members (the Mourning Cloak Team) collected statistics from the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and the Helena Municipal Court on accidents and injuries as a result of "careless/inattentive/distracted drivers." Members of the team also conducted their own informal surveys of cell phone use in June.

The informal surveys showed a relatively small percentage of cell phone use while driving. The city's traffic citations showed a decline in distracted driving tickets, though this was largely due to fewer police officers available on any one shift to address these infractions. However, statistics provided by the MDT (see Attachment) show a notable increase in injuries and deaths resulting from distracted driving in Lewis and Clark County and statewide. We assume distracted driving is primarily due to cell phone use.

The committee brought this report forward at the July 2016 HCC meeting, and the HCC as a whole considered making a recommendation to the Helena City Commission that police officers increase their enforcement of the ordinance. We were informed that it was unlikely police would be able to enforce this law more effectively without an increase in the budget and available officers; therefore, that recommendation was tabled.

However, discussion among HCC members yielded several possible approaches:

- A more thorough field survey
- An education/information effort in conjunction with others
- Enhanced enforcement with proceeds from fines available to address increases in enforcement efforts

Although the HCC does not have a specific recommendation for the City Commission at this time, members did believe it would be good to share the information gathered by the Mourning Cloak Team with members of the City Commission. Please refer to the data presented in the Attachment.

# *Fact finding information and activities addendum*

## People contacted and resulting information:

- Kevin Dusko, Impaired Driving Prevention Programs, MT Department of Transportation, provided county and statewide crash data (2006-2015). See Attachment
- Nikki Johnson, Court Administrator, Helena Municipal Court – informed the Committee that the Helena Municipal Court processed 186 distracted driving tickets from July 1, 2015 through July 21, 2016. The Attachment also provides the number of tickets processed in Helena from 2012 to 2015.
- Mourning Cloak's own informal survey – see graphs in Attachment

Cost-related information: Not Applicable