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Seeing a young woman last week driving down the road taking advantage of glow from the setting sun on her face during the "golden hour" to take a selfie was just too much for Rep. Rosemary Brown. "It is unbelievable the behaviors that are being accepted," said the Monroe County Republican who has been championing legislation to ban hand-held devices while driving for more than six years. She hopes this time it will finally reach the governor's desk.

The House Transportation Committee on Tuesday unanimously approved [Brown's bill](#) that would make it a summary offense that carries a \$100 fine for a driver, regardless of age, to be found using a handheld wireless communication device such as a cell phone while operating a vehicle on the road or at a traffic light.

There are exceptions to the ban built into her bill to address concerns that have been raised. They include provisions allowing a handheld device to be used exclusively for emergency notification, by an emergency service responder while operating an emergency vehicle engaged in the performance of duty, a commercial driver who uses the device within the scope of their job, and an individual with an amateur radio license issued by the FCC.

Brown's bill was inspired by Eileen and Paul Miller, whose 21-year-old son was killed in 2010 by a distracted tractor-trailer driver. The Millers have been fighting for Pennsylvania to join the now 25 states that have banned handheld devices while driving, including all the states surrounding Pennsylvania. Eileen Miller, wearing a button depicting a photo of her late son, was in attendance to witness the committee's action on Wednesday.

Noting statistics that show drivers are four times more likely to be involved in a crash when using a cell phone while driving, Brown said she knows her bill won't eliminate every crash that occurs. But she said, "The intent is to try to change the driver's behavior and the responsibility." Her bill would make using a handheld device a primary offense, meaning law enforcement could stop a driver solely for holding a device while driving regardless if it is in their hand or being supported by some part of their body.

In the last legislative session, [her bill passed the House](#) but failed to see action in the Senate. That bill was amended on the House floor to make it a secondary offense, meaning a police officer could only cite an adult driver for using a handheld device while operating a vehicle if they were stopped for another violation or involved in a crash. Brown was unhappy with that change, saying at the time, "there was no part of me that wanted to reduce any measure to a secondary offense."

Rep. Stephen Kinsey, D-Philadelphia, questioned whether this ban would apply to GPS units that help guide a driver to their destination. Brown indicated it would but clarified that a device such as a cellphone or GPS unit can still be used in a vehicle but it has to be docked in a docketing station, integrated into the vehicle, laying in the console, or just anywhere but on the driver. "This is the realistic balance," Brown said. "This is fair. This is reasonable."

Rep. Kyle Mullins, D-Lackawanna County, commended the Millers for their unwavering commitment to trying to make roadways safer. After seeing this hands-free legislation stop short session after session of becoming law, he said, "I think it's time to get this done." Brown's bill builds on the [state's 2012 law banning texting while driving](#) for all drivers, which makes that a primary offense in Pennsylvania. – [Pennlive](#)

On Monday, the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC) emphasized that mandatory 10-digit dialing for all telephone calls in the current 814 area code begins April 3. The beginning of mandatory 10-digit dialing on April 3 marks the next major step toward the arrival of a new "overlay" area code — 582 — which will eventually serve side-by-side with the current 814 area code. The 582 area code will be assigned to new telephone numbers once the available supply of numbers in the current 814 area code is exhausted.

Now is the time to confirm that one's family, business and devices are ready for the switch to 10-digit dialing, so there is a smooth transition on April 3 — especially things like medical alert systems, alarms, and any other systems that automatically make calls. As of April 3, anyone attempting to make a call in the 814 area code using only seven digits (without the area code) will receive a recorded message prompting them to hang up and redial the call using the full 10-digit number (area code plus seven-digit phone number).

To prepare for 10-digit dialing, consumers and businesses are encouraged to check devices that store telephone numbers — including cell phones and other devices with "speed dial" functions — to be certain that all the stored contacts include the area code. Moving forward, when adding any new numbers to those devices, be sure to include the area code. Devices that should be checked to verify they are configured for 10-digit dialing, include: Mobile phones, landline phones and tablets and fax machines that can save/store phone numbers; Life-safety and medical alert systems; Alarm/security systems and security gates; Call-forwarding settings and voicemail services; Internet dial-up systems; Automatic dialing equipment and software; Speed-dialers; Any other device that can save, store and automatically dial phone numbers.

Consumers or businesses with questions about the compatibility or programming of their devices should contact their equipment or service providers. To help consumers and businesses in the region adjust to the area code change, the PUC approved a timetable to implement the new overlay: Oct. 3, 2020 – Beginning of voluntary 10-digit dialing for calls in the 814 area code; April 3 – 10-digit dialing will be required for all calls; May 1 – The new overlay area code will be placed into service. The use of an overlay area code preserves existing phone numbers for residents and businesses in the region, while also ensuring that a supply of new numbers will be available after 814 number combinations are no longer available.

The 814 area code was established in 1947 and is one of Pennsylvania's four original area codes. It includes cities such as Altoona, Erie, Johnstown and State College, and covers all or parts of 27 counties, including Armstrong (northeastern portion only); Bedford; Blair; Cambria; Cameron; Centre (majority of the county); Clarion (all except portions of west); Clearfield; Clinton (small portions); Crawford (all except southwestern portion); Elk; Erie; Fayette (small portions); Forest; Fulton (western portions); Huntingdon (except Kishacoquillas Valley); Indiana (northern and eastern portions only); Jefferson; McKean; Mercer (extreme northeastern portion); Mifflin (extreme southwestern corner); Potter; Somerset; Tioga (western portions only); Venango (all except southeastern corner); Warren; and Westmoreland (extreme northeastern corner only).

814 is the largest area code in the state, geographically, and the only area that hasn't already received an additional area code overlay to replenish its dwindling supply of phone numbers. The 582 area code designation was selected by the North American Numbering Plan Administrator (NANPA), Somos Inc., the neutral third-party which administers telephone resources across the United States. – **Bradford Era**

The Republican vice-chairman of the Westmoreland County board of commissioners told a joint state government committee on Tuesday that it would help his county if the Legislature imposed a tighter deadline on voters to apply for a mail-in ballot. Commissioner Douglas Chew, providing written and spoken testimony to the Senate Special Committee on Election Integrity and Reform, used this May's primary as an example of how the deadlines are insufficient in anticipating reality. He noted that the last day for voters to apply for a mail-in or absentee ballot is May 11 — just seven days before Election Day, when the ballot is due back to the election bureau.

In a chart attached to his written testimony, he pointed out that if a voter applies on May 11 and all goes as planned — the application is processed

quickly, the ballot is mailed out the next day and the voter completes it and sends it back immediately — it wouldn't be expected to arrive back at the bureau until Election Day on May 18. That "leaves no amount of time for any delay or issue at the postal service," Mr. Chew wrote.

His testimony mirrored what many county commissioners across Pennsylvania say they want: for the state to push back the deadline to apply for mail-in ballots to 15 days before an election. The County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania came out in support of the change in January, insisting that the current deadline resulted in confusion and panic last November during the general election. Some voters received their ballots too close to the deadline and weren't confident they'd have enough time to mail them back successfully — so they went to their polling places to vote just "to be on the safe side," a report by the commissioners association read. "This wholly undermines the flexibility and convenience mail-in ballots should provide and causing unnecessary lines, crowds, more time spent in the polling location and a longer wait on election results as counties must then reconcile mail-in and provisional ballots for accuracy," the report continued.

The Senate committee is reviewing the 2020 election through a series of public hearings, and is expected to present a report to the state Legislature on what changes it recommends. The committee solicited insight from state and local election administrators on Tuesday. Mr. Chew, in written testimony, also pointed to an uninformed electorate as one of the biggest issues in administering the election. He said voters have been forced to quickly absorb a massive overhaul to voting — Act 77 — and numerous court orders and legal challenges.

Ahead of last November's election, about 76,200 voters requested a mail-in or absentee ballot in Westmoreland County, Mr. Chew said. It received 59,740 ballots back, meaning that it's possible that more than 20,000 people "may have been disenfranchised by a lack of understanding or information on these processes in the General Election alone." The commissioner suggested that the state undertake a campaign over the next year to educate voters on changes to the election code through online sessions, webinars, written materials and in-person demonstrations.

"As an educator of nearly 30 years, I feel responsible for not realizing that this past year my constituents were bombarded with so many new things, some a matter of life or death," Mr. Chew's testimony read. "I feel that we each have a responsibility as elected officials to help our constituents understand the laws of our Commonwealth." — **Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**

