

Student Sample C

Grade 11 Argument Writing Performance Task: Distracted Driving

Dangerous Driving

To the average driver, Oregon's laws concerning distracted driving seem to strike a happy balance between protecting the autonomy of drivers and protecting their lives and limbs. New research, however, suggests that the current laws fail to address one egregious form of distraction: Hands-free communication. Yet simply attaching a negligible fine to this unexpectedly dangerous activity is not enough, as statistics show that, despite the \$142 fine attached to using a phone without Bluetooth while driving, such behavior is still common amongst the nation's youngest drivers. And so, I contend that Oregon's distracted driving laws should be expanded to include blue-tooth use, and that penalties should be greater and more strictly enforced in order to create a positive change.

Some might claim that the use of head-sets and other hands-free devices reduce the physical distraction of speaking on the phone. Recent studies, however, have discovered that much of the distraction that causes crashes comes from not from the physical interference, but from the brain's inability to multitask. David Teater of the National Safety Council paraphrases a multitude of studies, explaining that the human brain can only work sequentially, toggling back and forth between complex tasks. Moreover, speaking on a cellphone lacks the visual cues, increasing the effort needed

to hold a conversation. A study by Adam Just says precisely that: brain activity associated with driving drops 37% when speaking on a cellphone. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration states that, statistically, using a headset is no safer than using a phone; it's the cognitive distraction that's dangerous, not the physical one. If we find it morally correct to assign penalties for cell phone useage, then surely a similar transgression with similar dangers ought to be punished in a similar manner. In allowing these products (Which erroneously claim to be "safer") in the cars of our citizens, then we more or less give them license to endanger their fellow drivers through distraction.

If we've established hat both cellphone and headset useage creates a significant danger, then the only remaining question is: how are we to enforce a ban on said products? Under the already – retributory status quo, texting and driving is still rampant, meaning that, despite the imposition of laws, safety is still threatened. Data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration states that 44% of drivers of 18-20 years have texted while driving. This increases to 49% in the next age bracket. While detractors claim that the word "ever" puts this statistic outside the scope of status quo (Oregon's law was passed in 2010), the youngest age bracket (at 44% useage) would have driven under Oregon's distraction penalties, rendering any objections to the evidence moot. It is clear that the status quo is not one that protects our drivers, as every year, several thousands are killed and half a million are injured, according to Distraction.gov. Many of these victims were likely innocent. Simply caught in an

individual's bad decision. A bad decision, one might add, that seems negligible because of the small fine associated with this most dangerous activity. Should we increase the fines, a stalwart deterrent would be put in place, preventing young adults from seeing this law as an arbitrary decision. In adding barbs to his law, we'd force respect out of dangerously driving individuals, fulfilling our duty towards the many innocent citizens who would otherwise meet an unfortunate end.

In expanding the scope of Oregon's laws to include hands-free talking, an equally dangerous form of distracted driving, as well as arming our laws with heftier fines, we would not be imposing on the liberty of our drivers to talk: we would be protecting the right of the drivers to live. We have not just a duty, but also a moral imperative to protect our citizens through the expansion of Oregon's distracted driving laws.