



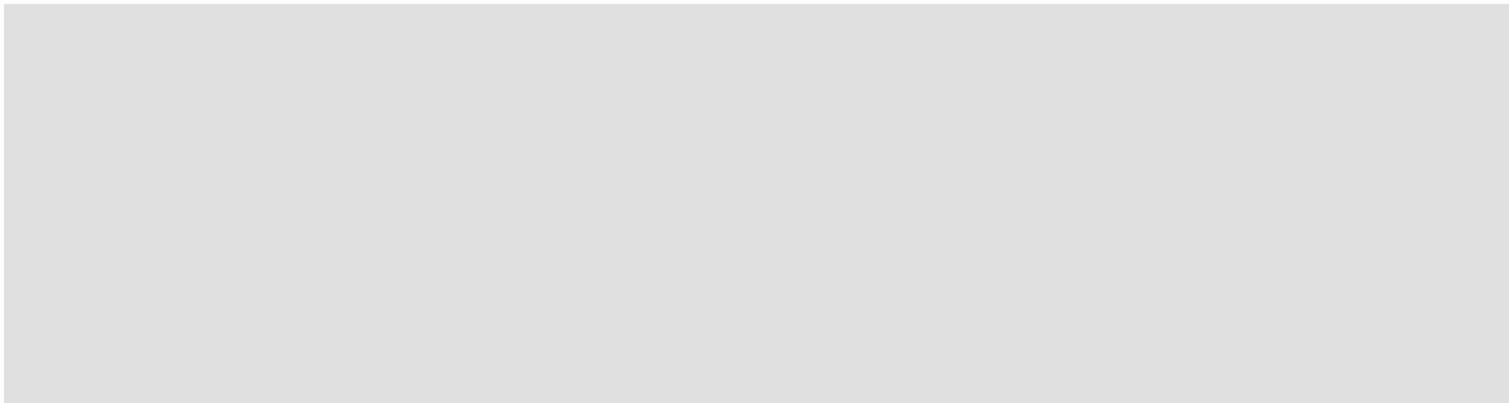
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HEALTH & FITNESS

Last-minute change to Pennsylvania cell phone bill stirs controversy



 By Nydia Han

BOOTHWYN, Pennsylvania (WPVI) -- A Pennsylvania bill to ban handheld cell phone use while driving is one step closer to becoming state law. But a last-minute change to the bill is causing a lot of controversy.

Many agree House Bill 37 is a step in the right direction, but there is a concern the legislation won't be as effective or enforceable due to an amendment made to the bill just before it passed the House this week.

There's no question our cell phones can be a dangerous, even deadly, distraction while driving.

It kills an average of nine people and injures over

1,000 people in America every day.

"This is a really incredible number. It is, it's startling," one driver told us.

House Bill 37 was designed to discourage cell phone use, making it illegal for drivers to talk on handheld phones.

"I think it's a great idea. People are using their phones all the time. They're looking down, they're not paying attention," said John Altfather of Centerville, Maryland.

"Even if you look away for a quick second, that can be the cause of an accident," said Kathy Hodges of New Castle, Delaware.

But House Bill 37 was amended just before it passed the Pennsylvania House Wednesday, and now some are questioning how effective it will be.

The amendment makes talking on a handheld cell phone while driving a secondary offense for drivers 18 and over.

That means police can only cite an adult driver for a violation if they're stopped for something else.

"A secondary offense makes the legislation difficult for law enforcement to enforce or quite honestly do anything about," says Jana Tidwell of AAA MidAtlantic.

The amendment also makes the state's 8-year-old texting while driving ban a non-stoppable offense, too.

"I think it should be a first offense and not a secondary. They should be pulled over because they have that phone in their hand and they're distracted," says Jeannette Raiford of New Castle, Delaware.

Officials at AAA say they are disappointed about the change but still support the bill.

"It is a step in the right direction and we're hopeful that we can strengthen legislation once already on the books," says Tidwell.

The citation will include a \$150 fine.

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