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101 rue Pine Street E  
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March 15, 2007

The Honourable Dalton McGuinty  
Premier of Ontario  
Legislative Building  
Queen's Park  
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier McGuinty:

**Re: Bill 68 - Highway Traffic Act Amendment (Cellular Phones) 2006**

We are writing to express our concern regarding the mounting evidence that cell phone use while driving increases the risk injury and death caused by motor vehicle collisions. Accordingly, we support Private Member's Bill 68.

Mobile communications have become part of every-day life as a means of keeping in touch with family, friends as well as participating in work activities while in transit from one place to another. One of the main reasons people give for purchasing a mobile phone is to be able to use it in emergencies (Ling, 2004) yet recent estimates show that 85% of cell phone owners use their phone while driving (Stayer et al, 2003) and 60% of their cell phone usage occurs while driving (Hahn et al, 2000). Cell phones are creating driver distraction and increasing the risk of injury and death on our roads.

Research has shown that drivers are four times more likely to have a motor vehicle collision when using a cellular telephone than when not using a cellular telephone, a risk similar to driving with a blood alcohol level at the legal limit (Redelmeier & Tibshirani, 2001). In fact, cell phones may actually exhibit greater impairments than intoxicated drivers and hands-free cell phones are no different than hand-held cell phones (Stayer, Drews & Couch, 2003). Some may think that public education would be sufficient to have people refrain from cell-phone use while driving but in a recent poll, 60% of drivers indicated that they would not stop using cell phones when driving even when told that their cell-phone use makes them four times more likely to be involved in a collision (Insurance Bureau of Canada, 2007). Research participants commented that they had observed others driving erratically while using a cell phone but rarely thought cell-phone use affected their driving showing a disparity between self-perception and their actual driving performance (Strayer, Drews & Johnston, 2003).

It has been argued that using cell phones and other telecommunications while driving are necessary in today's economy and a ban would result in economic losses (Hahn et al 2000). Yet when an Oakville company, AMEC, the international project management and engineering company, banned employees from using wireless devices while driving during work, they did not experience a decrease in productivity and many reported that they had also quit using wireless communications devices while driving outside of business hours (Douglas, 2006).

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Premier Dalton McGuinty

Re: Bill 68 - Highway Traffic Act Amendments (Cellular Phones) 2006

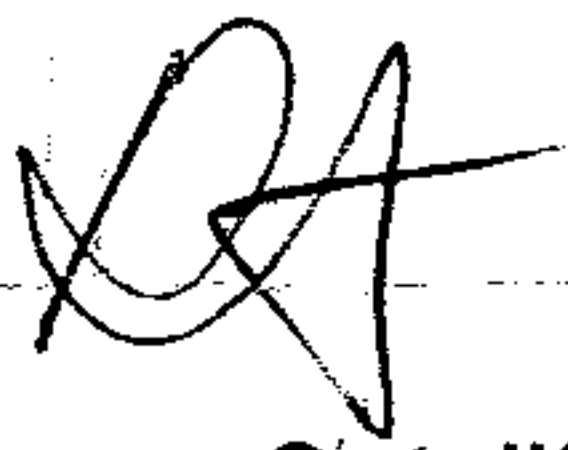
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There is also the opinion that such a law would be difficult to enforce and that there are already laws for careless driving. According to an Ontario Provincial Police Sergeant, it would be easier to charge someone if there was a specific law prohibiting cell-phone use rather than having to prove careless driving as a result of using a cell-phone (Chail, 2006).

In closing, we urge your government and indeed all the members of our provincial parliament to consider the evidence and support Bill 68 in order to enhance your government's efforts to improve road safety and to reduce motor vehicle-related injuries and deaths in Ontario.

Sincerely,



Penny Sutcliffe, MD, MHSc, FRCPC  
Medical Officer of Health and Chief Executive Officer

c.: Honourable George Smitherman, Minister of Health & Long-Term Care  
Honourable Jim Watson, Minister of Health Promotion  
Honourable Donna Cansfield, Minister of Transportation  
Dr. George Pasut, Acting Chief Medical Officer of Health  
Linda Stewart, Executive Director of aPHa  
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