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## YOUR COMMUTE

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### Texans still texting and driving, state says

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Kathy Bond understands that some would perceive a Texas law banning texting while driving as an unnecessary intrusion on personal liberty.

But she has a question for those who hold that view: "We're very concerned about protecting the rights of the phone holder. But where's our rights? Where's my daughter's rights?"

Her daughter, Katrina Bond, 22, was killed Sept. 7, 2011, on Interstate 35W when a man driving a heavy-duty pickup plowed into her car in a work zone. The pickup driver, a Godley resident, told police that he had received a text message two seconds before the collision, she said. He wasn't charged.

Bond, of far north Fort Worth, and many other Texans who have lost loved ones to distracted driving are stepping up their efforts to persuade lawmakers to crack down on offenders.

But it's proving to be an uphill battle.

Texas is among just five states that haven't passed a statewide texting ban — the others are Mississippi, Missouri, Montana and Oklahoma.

In 2011, Gov. Rick Perry vetoed a bill that would have banned texting while driving statewide, saying it was "government micromangement."

Republican Attorney General Greg Abbott, who is campaigning to replace the retiring Perry, also opposes a statewide ban, his spokesman told the *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*. His gubernatorial opponent, Democrat Wendy Davis of Fort Worth, supports a prohibition and co-wrote a bill that would have implemented a ban while she was a state senator.

Some North Texas cities, including Arlington, have adopted bans, but it's unclear whether they are reducing texting while driving. Austin, El Paso and San Antonio have also banned the practice.

Texas does have a state law banning the use of mobile devices in school zones.

The *Star-Telegram* recently observed traffic at four intersections in Tarrant County to gauge how many drivers appeared to be either texting or talking on the phone while driving. About 3.1 percent of motorists appeared to be texting, and 4.3 percent were seen talking on the phone. In all, 446 motorists were observed on weekday afternoons at intersections in Arlington, Fort Worth, Grapevine and Hurst.



View photos

#### Distracted drivers

The *Star-Telegram* went to four intersections on recent weekday afternoons to watch for motorists who appeared to be either texting or talking on a cellphone.

- In all, 7.4 percent of motorists were observed to be engaged in distracted behavior — either texting or talking while driving.
- Of 446 drivers randomly observed at the four locations, 14 were seen texting while driving, and 19 were talking on a phone.
- The results aren't scientific but are meant to offer a snapshot.

#### A closer look

- Grapevine, William D. Tate Avenue at Texas 114 frontage road: 46 cars observed; four drivers texting; three drivers talking on a phone
- North Fort Worth, Heritage Trace Parkway at Texas Sage Trail: 13 cars observed; one driver texting; no drivers talking on a phone
- Hurst, Texas 183 frontage road at Brown Trail: 215 cars observed; one driver texting; four drivers talking

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### Statewide campaign

For their part, Texas Department of Transportation officials have launched a high-profile campaign called "Talk. Text. Crash."

The agency had a rally in Austin, asking about 200 employers to adopt policies banning employees from using mobile devices while driving on the job.

Distracted driving causes 1 in 5 crashes in Texas, said Brian Barth, Fort Worth district engineer for the state Transportation Department.

"Whether it's the law or not, doing the right thing is doing the right thing," Barth said during a recent "Talk. Text. Crash." rally at Sundance Square in downtown Fort Worth. "Not driving a vehicle dangerously is the right thing. Even if it's a law, we've still got to educate the public they shouldn't be distracted while driving. They should have undivided attention on driving."

Fort Worth Police Chief Jeff Halstead raised concerns about patrol officers becoming distracted as they search for distracted drivers. He said that if a state law were enacted, he would feel safe enforcing it only if special patrol officers could go out in groups of two so that one officer could drive while the other searched for distracted drivers.

"The law would be a good step and a good measure, but I think a high and very strong education campaign, changing the technology culture of our younger generation, we have to do that first," he said. "Even with a law, our officers would be significantly distracted trying to enforce the law, and that's very unsafe for them operating a vehicle."

But advocates say they won't stop fighting until all 50 states enact a ban.

"A lot of people think we're taking away their rights," said Jennifer Zamora-Jamison of Roanoke.

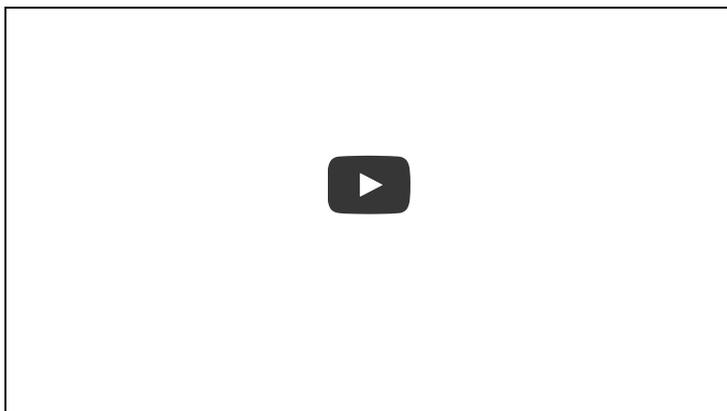
Her husband, Javier Zamora, was killed by a distracted driver in 2007, months after he returned from military duty in Iraq. The distracted driver wasn't charged.

"I just try and civilly explain to them, 'I don't want to take away your car. I don't want to take away your cellphone. I just want you to be responsible using both,'" she said.

Fatalities involving distracted drivers increased 4 percent in Texas in 2013 but decreased in many states that ban texting while driving, said Jennifer Smith, executive director of stopdistractions.org.

Smith, whose mother, Linda Doyle, was killed by a driver talking on a cellphone in 2008, supports the statewide campaign but says it's not enough. The driver in the crash that killed Doyle also wasn't charged.

"In other states, I'm seeing a lot of progress with crashes ticking down," said Smith, a former Grapevine resident now living near Chicago. "In Texas, unfortunately, those crashes are going up every year. Something needs to be done here in Texas."



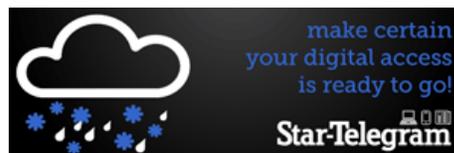
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on a phone

• Arlington, South Cooper Street near UTA Boulevard: 172 cars observed; eight drivers texting; 12 drivers talking on a phone

**Total:** 446 cars observed; 14 drivers (3.1 percent) texting; 19 drivers (4.3 percent) talking on a phone

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