

Coventry Students Reminded of Texting Dangers

Attorney General visits CHS to tell students It Can Wait

Kilmartin, Department of Transportation, local and state police officials visit Oakers to decry texting while driving

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COVENTRY— Following the success of last year's "It Can Wait" campaign, members of the attorney general's office, the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT), AT&T and local and state police departments visited Coventry High School Thursday morning to educate the students about the dangers of texting while driving.

To date, Attorney General Peter Kilmartin has visited 22 schools across the state, and 8,600 students have pledged to not text and drive.

"Texting while driving is a major prob-

lem, both in Rhode Island and across the country. We have seen multiple accidents right here in Rhode Island in which distracted driving and/or texting while driving was a contributing factor," said Kilmartin. "Just as it took time and education to convince people to wear seat belts, it will take time to change attitudes about how dangerous it is to text and drive."

RIDOT State Traffic Engineer Bob Rocchio explained to the senior class that texting takes an average of three to five seconds to send.

"If you're driving at 50 mph you would have traveled 360 feet with your eyes off the road," he said. "That's equivalent to

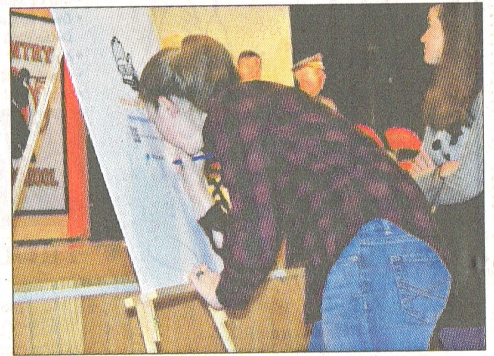
driving longer than the length of a football field with your eyes closed."

He said driving while texting can be compared to driving while intoxicated; in both situations the operator of the vehicle swerves, slows down and speeds up rapidly, which may cause an accident.

To ensure teenagers and adults stop texting while driving, the legislators have tried to pass a bill that would enforce harsher penalties.

"In 2009 the General Assembly passed a texting ban bill," he added. "Kilmartin supported that bill. This year, we strengthen that more to include license suspension as a possible penalty to tex-

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A Coventry High School student signs her name to a petition promising not to text and drive at a presentation in the school's auditorium yesterday.

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ting while driving.”

Enforcing the rules however is not done by just giving out tickets, he said, people must be educated as well.

To do so, AT&T, whose partnered up with the attorney general and RIDOT has created a documentary to help people better understand the dangers of texting while driving.

Regional Director for External Affairs at AT&T Joseph Shannon explained that it is “important” to stay in touch with parents, friends, brothers and sisters by texting.

“But texting while driving is a problem; you have to use your mind, you have to use your eyes and hands and we can’t do both at the same time,” he emphasized.

The students were then showed the documentary “The Last Text,” which showed the life changing events that can occur from texting and driving and the effects it has on family and friends.

“That’s about the 25th time I’ve seen that documentary,” said Rhode Island State Police Major David Tikoian. “And I can tell you that when that video first started I heard an undercurrent in the auditorium but that quickly turned to silence because of what you saw. I know you get it because every time I see that video it moves me a little bit too.”

Assistant Attorney General Jay Sullivan explained that the hardest part of being a prosecutor for the attorney general’s office is dealing with the families of the victim’s of texting and driving.

“To you this is a video but to me and the members of law enforcement, this is our life,” he added. “Every time a young person gets killed in Rhode Island the parents want to know why and I’ve been assigned to handle all the



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ABOVE: Students raise their hands to admit to texting while they drove to school yesterday morning in the auditorium at Coventry High, where a presentation from Attorney General Peter Kilmartin was held outlining its dangers. RIGHT: A Coventry senior signs the petition to forgo texting while driving at the presentation’s conclusion.

driving cases in the state.”

When he began prosecuting the driving cases seven years ago, he said, there were approximately 100 fatalities a year in the state with 25 of those being teenagers.

“I can tell you these are the worst meetings ever, because no matter how much you tell them and try to comfort (parents), they will never get over the loss of a child,” he explained.

“The people who are involved in these crashes are not bad people. They’re not your typical criminals; they made a mistake. But the problem is this bad decision cost a life.”

He explained to the students that Coventry High School has lost two students in the past five years, “so you know how it impacts the community.”

Coventry Police Chief Bryan Volpe explained

that having two teenage daughters is what made him aware of the dangers of texting and driving.

He asked the students in the auditorium how many of them had driven to school that morning and how many had looked at their telephones and texted.

More than half of the attendees raised their hands in response.

“As the police chief it is my priority to provide a safe community for everybody,” he said. “One of the most difficult parts of our job is notifying the family that a member of their family has been injured or killed in a vehicle accident. I know this because I’ve had to perform this duty.”

At the end of the ceremony, more than 400 students signed the pledge to not text and drive.

