


Opinion

Another Voice: No one should lose his life over a text message

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By Evan M. Goldberg and Dennis J. Garvey

As we continue our annual summer road trips, we know to check our oil and make sure our tires have enough air. But few of us think about something that can be a lot more dangerous – distracted driving. Across the country, 1,100 people are killed or injured daily by distracted drivers. In 2013, 3,154 people were killed in car accidents involving distracted drivers. Only last month, Patrick Wanninkhof, a Bronx high school teacher, was killed on a cross-country bike trip when an Oklahoma driver was looking at her cell phone while driving.

Just a few seconds spent reaching for a soda, turning around or even letting one’s mind wander can lead to drivers losing control and cause accidents with deadly consequences.

As lawyers, we have worked with countless victims of distracted drivers and, in some cases, we have personally lost our loved ones. Pennsylvania trial lawyer Joel Feldman lost his 21-year-old daughter, Casey, when she was struck and killed by a distracted driver in 2009 while crossing an intersection.

Since then, Feldman has been a tireless advocate to finally put an end to distracted driving. He has delivered presentations to teens in high schools nationwide about its dangerous consequences. Trial lawyer associations from across the country joined the “End Distracted Driving” campaign to educate teens on safe driving, and more than 50,000 students nationwide have seen Feldman’s powerful presentation. As a result of his work, many teens have joined Feldman in his pledge to never call or text while driving.

This coming school year, New York State Trial Lawyers Association members will deliver the presentation at high schools

upstate to recruit additional students to join the pledge.

This important drive for change cannot be the work of teens and legislators alone. We should remember that drivers of all ages can find their attention diverted by passengers, entertainment and other distractions. Drivers in their 20s comprise 27 percent of the distracted drivers involved in fatal crashes. The driver behind the wheel when Casey Feldman died was 58. One in 10 parents surveyed admitted that they regularly have extended, multmessage text conversations while driving.

As we load our cars and take to the road for the end of summer, we would all be wise to think of Casey Feldman, Patrick Wanninkhof and the countless other victims who have lost their lives to distracted drivers. We ask that you join the pledge to limit your distractions while driving and talk to friends and loved ones about it. No one should lose his life over a text message.

Evan M. Goldberg is president of the New York State Trial Lawyers Association. Dennis J. Garvey is president of the New York State Trial Lawyers Association, Western Regional Affiliate.

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