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Lawmakers Considering Driver Cell Phone Ban

By Ted Land

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JUNEAU, Alaska

State lawmakers are once again talking about banning Alaskans from using cell phones behind the wheel.

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The House Transportation Committee Tuesday started digging into a batch of bills which would create penalties for distracted driving.

Republicans and Democrats are pushing the measures, which impose varying degrees of penalties on drivers who talk on the phone.

Rep. Mike Doogan (D-Anchorage) pushed a bill on the topic last year, but it didn't get far. This session there is broader bipartisan support.

"It may be time for the legislature to take a hard look at it," said House Majority Leader Rep. Alan Austerman (R-Kodiak).

"For the first time I think the legislature and the public are willing to limit the use of cell phones," said Rep. Max Gruenberg (D-Anchorage).

Rep. Cathy Munoz's (R-Juneau) measure is emerging as the front-runner, and would allow police to pull a driver over for using a hand-held device. Hands-free systems would be allowed.

Other lawmakers like Rep. Berta Gardner (D-Anchorage) think restrictions should only apply to drivers under the age of 18.

"I don't think many minors like this bill, but as someone who was recently a minor, I can see a use for it," testified Randi Spray, an intern for Rep. Gardner.

Still others think even hands-free devices should be banned and that the potential law should apply to bicyclists as well.

Transportation Committee Chair Peggy Wilson (R-Wrangell) says there's a lot to sort through and that lawmakers should hear more public testimony before deciding how to proceed.

“I don’t want them to think that we railroaded this through without giving them a chance to testify,” said Wilson.

The committee will take up the issue once again next week when lawmakers return from an energy conference in Washington D.C.

Do you think there should be a law banning cell phone use while driving? [Tell on Speakupalaska.com.](http://www.ktuu.com/news/akpolitics/ktuu-lawmakers-considering-bannin...)

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