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Members of Lee County Legislative Delegation:

BikeWalkLee, a coalition working to complete Lee County's streets, urges you to take action this legislative session to address the growing problem of distracted driving, especially texting while driving. Vulnerable road users, such as pedestrians, bicyclists and motorcyclists, are most at risk from distracted drivers.

It was disappointing to read the recent News-Press story quoting Rep. Gary Aubuchon saying that "the Legislature isn't in the mood to legislate issues that are really matters of personal responsibility." Using this logic, we should repeal laws against drunk driving and requirements to wear seatbelts. The seat belt law alone saved 12,713 lives in 2009 and 267,890 lives since 1975, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Agency (NHTSA). How many more people will have to die from distracted driving before our elected representatives understand that legislative action is needed to save lives? What's at stake here is the safety of our citizens—motorists, as well as pedestrians, bicyclists and motorcyclists.

The national trends are alarming. The NHTSA says 20% of injury crashes in 2009 involved reports of distracted driving, and the portion of drivers reportedly distracted at the time of fatal crashes increased from 7% in 2005 to 11% in 2009. Florida ranks in the top third of all states in terms of traffic fatalities (per vehicle miles traveled). Without action by our legislature, Florida's roads will become even more deadly. The U.S. Secretary of Transportation has launched a national campaign to ban texting while driving and other deadly distractions and 30 states have taken action to ban texting while driving. Sadly, Florida is not one of them.

There are several ways the legislature could address this issue, from a legislative ban on texting while driving to a revision in the existing Careless Driving statute. The latter approach would address all distractions that impair the drivers' ability to control their vehicle. Regardless of the approach taken, it's important that the provisions have teeth and are enforceable.

Laws aren't the only answer, but they are an important first step. We look forward to working with you to make our roadways safer for all users.

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