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January 23, 2008

To: Representative Joseph Souki, , Chair, House Committee on Transportation;  
Representative Scott Nishimoto, Vice Chair; and members of the Committee

From: Carol McNamee – Public Policy Committee, MADD-Hawaii

Re: House Bill 1987 – Relating to Motor Vehicles

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I am Carol McNamee testifying on behalf of the membership of MADD-Hawaii in support of HB 1987, relating to Motor Vehicles. This bill amends the Graduated Drivers' Licensing statute by placing a restriction on the use of cell phones and other electronic devices by young drivers under the age of 18, including those driving with a provisional license.

Young drivers continue to be over-involved in highway crashes in Hawaii and across the country. Studies have shown that novice drivers tend to be more easily impaired by distractions such as multiple passengers in the vehicle than are more experienced drivers. With more teens using cell phones, there is an increasing risk of young drivers causing crashes as a result of the distraction of having a cell phone conversation while operating a vehicle.

Last year, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety found that drivers using phones are four times as likely to get into crashes serious enough to injure themselves. Its findings are consistent with a 1997 Canadian study that also showed phone use was associated with a fourfold increase in the risk of a property damage accident.

After recently investigating a number of fatal crashes involving teen drivers, the National Transportation Safety Board has issued a strong recommendation to states to amend GDL laws by adding cell phone restrictions. The Safety Board recommends that States prohibit the use of any wireless communication device, hand-held or hands-free, by holders of learner's permits or provisional licenses, under age 18. Currently there are 10 States that restrict cell phone use by drivers with an instructional and/or intermediate license.

MADD suggests that HB 1987 specifically state that drivers under the age of 18 be restricted from using all cell phone or electronic communication devices, including those that are hands-free, while operating a vehicle, in keeping with the NTSB recommendation.

MADD Hawaii believes that restricting the use of cell phones and similar devices by teen drivers will increase the safety of our youth as well as better protect the safety of other drivers on Hawaii's roads and highways. We encourage the committee to pass HB 1987.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.