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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Governor Mary Fallin Signs Texting While Driving Ban

OKLAHOMA CITY - Governor Mary Fallin today signed House Bill 1965, making it illegal to text and drive in Oklahoma. House Bill 1965 makes texting while driving a primary offense, meaning law officers will be able to pull over anyone who is texting while operating a vehicle. The penalty will be \$100.

The governor, during her State of the State address earlier this year, called on lawmakers to pass a texting while driving ban.

“Over a dozen Oklahomans die every year in accidents caused by drivers who are distracted by cell phones,” said Fallin. “Hundreds more are injured. Studies show that driving while texting can actually be more dangerous than driving drunk.”

Fallin said she hopes the law will save lives by changing driver behavior and attitudes regarding texting while driving.

“My hope is that this bill does more than just change the law,” Fallin said. “As a state, we need to change the way we think about texting while driving. The fact is it’s dangerous. If we can get people to think about it that way, we can drive more responsibly, save a lot of lives and make our roads much safer.”

HB 1965 is called the Trooper Nicholas Dees and Trooper Keith Burch Act of 2015, named for the two Oklahoma Highway Patrol troopers who were struck by a vehicle earlier this year while investigating an accident on Interstate 40 in Seminole County. Dees died at the scene, and Burch was hospitalized. The driver of the vehicle was using a smart phone at the time of the accident.

Several troopers attended today's bill-signing as well as members of the Nicholas Dees and Keith Burch families, including retired Trooper Bruce Dees and Brandi Dees, the father and widow of Nicholas Dees, and Kayla Burch, the wife of Trooper Keith Burch. Trooper Burch was unable to attend because he still is undergoing rehabilitation for his injuries.

HB 1965 received overwhelming support in the Legislature. It passed 38-6 in the Senate and 85-7 in the House of Representatives.

Oklahoma is the 46th state to pass legislation banning the practice of texting while driving.

HB 1965 contains exceptions for certain emergency situations and specifies it will not apply to devices operated in a voice-activated mode in which a driver's hands would not be needed to write, send or read a text message.

HB 1965 was authored by Rep. Terry O'Donnell in the House and by the Committee on Public Safety in the Senate. It takes effect Nov. 1.

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