

New rules on texting while driving

Violators of Louisiana's ban on social media use or texting while driving will now receive harsher penalties after the governor signed a bill Monday (June 13) to raise those fines.

First time violators will be fined up to \$500 instead of the previous \$175. Fines will go up to \$1,000, as opposed to \$500, for additional violations after Gov. John Bel Edwards signed Senate Bill 91, sponsored by Sen. Yvonne Dorsey Colomb's, D-Baton Rouge.

First time violators under 18 could get a \$250 fine, up from \$100, and fines for subsequent offenses increased to \$500 from \$250. These offenders will also get driver's license suspensions for 60 days.

Fines for those using cell phones in school zones also increased to \$500 from \$175 for the first violation. The \$500 fine for additional violations not only increased to \$1,000, but violators will also lose their license for 60 days.

Lawmakers agreed to appropriate \$25 from each of these fines for the indigent defender fund of the judicial district where the citation was issued.

Authorities have continuously fought to reduce distracted driving by cell phone use even before the AAA noted that 60 percent of car crashes involving teenagers occur while these drivers are talking on the phone, texting or are otherwise distracted.

Some states have even looked into using a 'textalyzer' device to gauge driver distraction or apps to disrupt cell phone use. A Pennsylvania judge also ruled that anyone texting a driver could share liability if the driver crashes while reading or responding to that text.