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TO: The Honorable Maggie McIntosh, Chairman
Members, House Environmental Matters Committee
The Honorable James E. Malone, Jr.

FROM: Joseph A. Schwartz, III
Pamela Metz Kasemeyer
J. Steven Wise

DATE: February 15, 2011

RE: **SUPPORT** – House Bill 196 – *Motor Vehicles – Use of Text Messaging Device While Driving – Prohibited Acts*

The Maryland State Medical Society (MedChi), which represents over 7,300 Maryland physicians and their patients, supports House Bill 196.

Maryland has been a leader in addressing issues of distracted driving, young driver safety and other issues relative to maintaining and enhancing the safety of our roadways. House Bill 196 provides a critical enhancement to Maryland's current ban on the use of hand held communication devices while driving. Current law prohibits the writing or sending of text messages while driving but does not include reading those messages nor does it include e-mail in any manner. These distinctions are illogical and only serve to undermine the intent of the law – to eliminate an activity that significantly contributes to distracted driving and the accidents, injury and death that are caused by these unsafe driving practices.

House bill 196 adds “reading” text messages to the current ban and also clarifies that the ban includes e-mail as well. Further, the bill removes the provision that applies the ban when “moving” so that the prohibition will now apply whenever a vehicle is in the travel portion of the roadway. Much like the meritless distinction between sending and reading messages, allowing messaging while sitting at an intersection or in traffic undermines the intent and effectiveness of the law. For the prohibition to be effective, it must apply in a manner that causes drivers to put their device away, not pick it up every time they stop.

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The sponsor of this legislation has been a leader in advancing Maryland's safe driving legislation and should be commended. House Bill 196 will enhance the effectiveness of the current law and eliminate distinctions that lack justification. MedChi urges a favorable report.

For more information call:

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