

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2014 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 1230

(Delegate McDermott, *et al.*)

Environmental Matters

Vehicle Laws - Signal Devices on Personal Vehicles - Fire Police

This bill repeals the limit on the number of members of duly constituted volunteer fire departments who may equip their private vehicles with blinking or oscillating red lights or signal devices and expands the authorization for this equipment to all members of a duly constituted volunteer fire department who meet the specified qualifications. The existing restriction on the display of these lights or signal devices to only while en route to or at the scene of an emergency is retained.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Potential minimal reduction in general fund revenues to the extent the expansion of authorization under the bill leads to fewer citations. No effect on expenditures as enforcement can be handled with existing resources.

Local Effect: Enforcement can be handled with existing resources.

Small Business Effect: Potential minimal. Small businesses that sell the lights and devices referenced in the bill may benefit from additional sales as more people qualify to display the devices.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The bill expands the members of authorized volunteer fire departments who may equip their vehicles with red lights or signal devices to (1) an assistant or deputy chief, whether or not the rank is second in command and (2) a volunteer firefighter who has sworn police powers and is carrying out official fire police duties.

Current Law: The Maryland Vehicle Law authorizes the vehicles of government fire departments, duly constituted volunteer fire departments, rescue squads, or the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems to be equipped with or display red and/or white lights or signal devices.

In each volunteer fire company, a maximum of five officers may have their privately owned vehicles equipped with red lights or signal devices that are designed to emit an oscillating, rotating, blinking, or other light emission and may be displayed only while en route to or at the scene of an emergency. The authorized volunteer fire company members are (1) the fire chief or highest ranking fireline officer; (2) one or more assistant chiefs or deputy chiefs, whichever rank is second in command; and (3) the emergency medical services commander.

In addition, the fire police of each volunteer fire company may equip their privately owned vehicles with red lights or signal devices, as specified. The lights or signal devices may only be flashed, oscillated, or used while the vehicle is at the scene of an accident, flood, or other emergency to which the volunteer fire company is responding.

A person who drives or moves a motor vehicle onto a highway with oscillating or blinking red and/or white lights or signal devices in violation of the Maryland Vehicle Law is guilty of a misdemeanor and is subject to a \$500 maximum fine. The prepayment penalty established by the District Court is \$60.

Background: The District Court advises that, in fiscal 2013, a total of 34 citations were filed for the use of blinking or oscillating red and/or white signal lights or devices on motor vehicles in violation of the Maryland Vehicle Law. Of these, drivers admitted guilt and prepaid for 19 citations, 12 citations went to trial, and 3 remained open.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Baltimore, Charles, and Frederick counties; cities of Frederick and City of Havre de Grace; Maryland Municipal League; Department of State Police; Maryland Department of Transportation; Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); Department of Legislative Services

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Analysis by: Karen D. Morgan

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510