

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2020 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 702 (Delegate Malone)
Environment and Transportation

Vehicle Laws - Rules of the Road - Lane Changes

This bill generally applies the requirements for signaling while turning to lane change maneuvers. It authorizes a driver to move from a lane or from a shoulder or bikeway into a lane only when the driver has reasonably determined that such a maneuver is safe and has activated the appropriate turn signal. The bill also expands the circumstances in which signals are required when another vehicle might be affected by the movement – specifically by prohibiting a driver from moving a vehicle to the right or left to change lanes unless the driver gives an appropriate signal, as specified. Further, when a signal to change lanes is required, the signal must be given continuously before making the lane change, except that a bicyclist may interrupt a turning signal to maintain control of the bicycle. A violation is a misdemeanor subject to a maximum fine of \$100 and is not a moving violation for which points may be assessed.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund revenues increase, potentially significantly, to the extent additional citations are issued under the bill, as discussed below. The Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) and the Department of State Police can handle the bill’s changes with existing budgeted resources.

Local Effect: Enforcement can be handled with existing resources. Revenues are not affected.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: A vehicle must be driven as nearly as practicable entirely within a single lane. The Maryland Vehicle Law prohibits a driver from moving from a lane or moving from a shoulder or bikeway into a lane until the driver has determined that it is safe to do so. A violation of this provision is a misdemeanor, subject to a maximum fine of \$500. The prepayment penalty established by the District Court is \$90, and MVA must assess one point against the driver's license. If the violation contributes to an accident, the prepayment penalty is \$130 and MVA must assess three points against the license.

If any other vehicle might be affected by the movement, a driver may not turn a vehicle unless the driver gives an appropriate signal, as specified. A signal of an intention to turn right or left must be given continuously during at least the last 100 feet traveled by the vehicle before turning. A bicyclist, however, may interrupt the turning signal to maintain control of the bicycle.

Signal lamps may be used to indicate an intention to turn; change lanes; or start from a stopped, standing, or parked position. The signal lamps may not be flashed, however, as a courtesy or "do pass" signal to the driver of any other vehicle approaching from the rear. Each required stop or turn signal must be given by hand or arm or by signal lamps, as specified.

A violation of any of the above provisions is a misdemeanor subject to a maximum fine of \$500. The prepayment penalty established by the District Court for a violation is \$90, and MVA must assess one point against a violator's license. If the violation contributes to an accident, the prepayment penalty is \$130 and MVA must assess three points against the license.

Background: According to the District Court, in fiscal 2019, there were 10,204 citations issued for unsafe lane changes, 850 citations issued for turning without giving the appropriate signal, and 682 citations issued for failure to signal continuously before turning.

State Revenues: Expansion of the requirement to signal when changing lanes increases general fund revenues, perhaps significantly, to the extent that additional citations are issued for violations under the bill. As discussed above, a significant number of citations were issued in fiscal 2019 for unsafe lane changes, turning without giving appropriate signal, and failure to signal continuously before turning. While the bill's impact on general fund revenues ultimately depends on the number of citations issued under the bill and the actual amount of imposed and prepaid fines, the extent of the impact may be significant, based on the number of citations issued for similar existing offenses.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: HB 1043 of 2016, a similar bill, received an unfavorable report from the House Environment and Transportation Committee. HB 818 of 2015, a similar bill, passed the House as amended and received a hearing in the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, but no further action was taken.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); Department of State Police; Maryland Department of Transportation; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 19, 2020
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