

Legislative Analysis



SCHOOL BUS SIGNAL LIGHTS

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House Bill 5969 as enrolled
Public Act 231 of 2004

Sponsor: Rep. Joanne Voorhees
House Committee: Transportation
Senate Committee: Transportation
First Analysis (8-30-04)

BRIEF SUMMARY: The bill would amend the Pupil Transportation Act to require signal lights on school buses to conform to federal regulations, delete references to “sealed beam” signal lights, and add procedures for receiving and dropping off children when they do not have to cross the road to board or get off the school bus.

FISCAL IMPACT: The bill would have no apparent fiscal impact.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

The Pupil Transportation Act (Public Act 187 of 1990) was enacted to provide a single, comprehensive state law regulating the operation of school buses in the state. The act improved and incorporated existing state school bus laws contained in the Revised School Code and the Michigan Vehicle Code, and related administrative rules. Legislation to update and clarify language in the act dealing with signal lights and procedures for boarding and discharging students has been introduced.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The Pupil Transportation Act includes specific criteria related to the size, color, location, and functionality of the signal lights on school buses. The bill would delete these provisions and require, instead, that the signal lights conform to U.S. Department of Transportation federal motor vehicle safety regulations and the Michigan Vehicle Code. In addition, the bill would delete references to “sealed beam” signal lights. The bill would also specifically require the signal lights and stoplights on school buses manufactured prior to October 1, 1990 to conform to current U.S. Department of Transportation federal motor vehicle safety regulations.

The act requires that if children are required to cross the road when getting on to or off of the school bus, the driver must stop the bus as far to the right side of the road as possible so as to provide for the safety of the children. The bill would require, instead, that the driver stop the bus in the extreme right-hand lane when children are boarding or disembarking.

The act also specifies that if children are not required to cross the road in order to board or disembark, and the road is wide enough so as to allow the bus to pull over to the far right of the road and allow traffic to flow and still provide for the safety of the children, the driver *may* activate the hazard lights at least 200 feet before the stop, if the road's speed limit is no more than 35 miles per hour. The bill would require (rather than allow) the driver to turn on the hazard lights, delete the reference to 200 feet, and apply this provision to roads where the speed limit is no more than 45 miles per hour.

In addition, the bill would specify if the children are not required to cross the road to board or disembark, the driver of a school bus manufactured prior to October 1, 1990 with only alternatively flashing overhead red lights would have to (1) activate the lights at least 200 feet before the stop the bus stop, (2) stop the bus as far off the road as practicable to ensure the safety of the children, and (3) continue to activate the lights while the children are boarding or disembarking.

The bill would also specify that if children are not required to cross the road to board or disembark, the driver of a school bus with red and amber alternately flashing overhead lights would have to (1) activate the amber lights at least 200 feet before the stop, (2) stop the bus as far off the road as practicable to ensure the safety of the children, (3) deactivate the amber lights, and (4) activate the red lights.

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The bill would update provisions in the Pupil Transportation Act related to the design of turn signal lights on school buses. The act requires turn signals to be "sealed beam" lights. Reportedly, this technology is outdated and, as such, presents school districts, bus manufacturers, and repair shops with several difficulties when trying to use more up-to-date technology. Deleting the reference to sealed beam lights permits school buses in the state to utilize whatever technology is most appropriate.

In addition, the bill adds language clarifying the protocol employed by school bus drivers when children are boarding or disembarking the bus and do not have to cross the street when entering or exiting the school bus.

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