

ALLOW FUNERAL PROCESSION PURPLE FLAGS

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House Bill 4072 as passed by the House
Sponsor: Rep. Robert J. Bezotte
Committee: Regulatory Reform [Discharged]
Complete to 7-8-24

Analysis available at
<http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

SUMMARY:

House Bill 4072 would amend the Michigan Vehicle Code to allow a vehicle in a funeral procession to display a purple flag. (Funeral procession flags now must be fluorescent orange.) The bill also would specifically say that such a vehicle can use its hazard lights.

Purple flags

Currently, a vehicle in a funeral procession has the right-of-way over other nonemergency vehicles at an intersection if it displays a fluorescent orange flag with an authorized religious symbol (a black cross, the Star of David, or the crescent and star).

The bill would additionally allow these flags to be purple. Purple flags would still have to display an authorized religious symbol as described above.

Hazard lights

Section 698a of the code now allows a driver to use hazard lights to warn other drivers of the presence of a traffic hazard that requires unusual care in approaching, overtaking, or passing.

Section 698(5)(g) of the code now allows a vehicle leading, escorting, or that is part of a funeral procession to be equipped with flashing, rotating, or oscillating purple or amber lights that are activated only during a funeral procession.

The bill would add new language that says that a vehicle leading, escorting, or that is part of a funeral procession may activate either or both of the following:

- The hazard warning lights a vehicle is allowed to use as described above.
- The flashing, rotating, or oscillating purple or amber lights that vehicles in a funeral procession are allowed to use as described above.

The bill would take effect 90 days after its enactment.

MCL 257.654

BACKGROUND:

Michigan law gives vehicles in a funeral procession the right-of-way at intersections as long as they display a fluorescent orange flag with a specified Christian, Jewish, or Islamic religious symbol. Failure to yield to vehicles in a funeral procession at an intersection, regardless of traffic lights or signs, is a civil infraction. (However, this does not apply to emergency vehicles.) It is also a civil infraction to pass through, or cut into, a funeral procession with a vehicle of any kind.

House Bill 4072 is identical to HB 4660 of the 2021-22 legislative session as passed by the House. In committee testimony on that bill, it was noted that cars in a funeral procession typically have their headlights on to help them stand out from ordinary traffic. However, this custom dates from a time when most headlights had to be turned on and off manually. Now that many cars have daytime running lights and lights that turn on and off automatically in varying light conditions, having headlights on in the daytime isn't as distinctive as it once was. Reportedly, incidents of cars cutting into or making a turn through a procession are increasing. This is not only disrespectful to (and stressful for) people who are grieving the loss of a family member or friend, it also increases the risk of potentially serious accidents and injuries. Some have suggested that specifically allowing the use of hazard lights could provide for added visibility.

Funeral flags in Michigan have had to be fluorescent orange with black religious symbols since 1976. Before that, they were white with purple symbols.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The bill would have no fiscal impact on the state or local units of government.

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