



JERRY PETROWSKI

WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR

DOT Legislative Package: Senate Bills 154 – 157

May 27, 2015

Good morning, members of the committee, and thank you for the opportunity to testify on four bills brought to me by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. These are simple, practical bills that I believe make commonsense changes and update the statutes to reflect modern practices. Representatives from DOT will also be available to answer any questions regarding these bills.

Senate Bill 154

Under current law, drivers facing a flashing yellow traffic signal may enter an intersection with caution without stopping, however the statutes are silent on the topic of flashing yellow arrow signals.

This bill clarifies that when a driver faces a flashing yellow arrow traffic signal, the driver may enter the intersection and make the turn without stopping only after yielding to other traffic lawfully in the intersection. This is a simple change to reflect modern standards in traffic control systems.

Senate Bill 155

Under current law, when pedestrian traffic control signals are in place, pedestrians may cross a roadway when the signal displays the word "Walk" and may not cross the roadway when the signal displays the words "Don't Walk."

As many of you know, current technology for these signals allow for a wider array of indicators that are not currently addressed in statute, such as a walking person symbol or an upraised hand signal. This bill updates the statutes and adds clarity to reflect other symbols that are now in use and approved under the Manual of Uniform Control Devices published by the Federal Highway Administration and adopted by the Department of Transportation.

Senate Bill 156

Current state law requires that emergency vehicles must activate both their warning lights and give an audible signal when stopping, standing, or parking in areas where doing so is normally restricted, such as on the shoulder of major highways. In practice, however, this requirement has

29TH SENATE DISTRICT

been found to jeopardize the safety of law enforcement personnel, as well as other drivers, especially in situations when a large number of emergency vehicles are present with warning lights activated.

Excessive lighting can be distracting and confusing, and may also direct the focus of other drivers to the lights rather than the roadway. This is particularly true on the scene of major highway accidents, with drivers traveling the opposite direction creating a bottleneck or traffic jam when they slow and turn their attention to the lights.

This bill eliminates this requirement related to stopping, standing, and parking. In general, law enforcement personnel must still activate their warning lights and give an audible signal to remain exempt from restrictions related to speed, obedience to traffic signals, and direction of travel when in pursuit of a violator or responding to an emergency.

Senate Bill 157

Under current law, driver licenses may display a number of different restrictions pertaining to the driver (corrective eyewear, occupational hours of service, graduated driver license, etc.). Under current law, if the text of those restrictions is not able to fit on the front or back of the driver license, the Department of Motor Vehicles is required to print and provide the driver a special restrictions card, which includes the remaining text. This creates difficulty for the driver in having to maintain multiple cards, and results in increased costs and complexities for the printing vendors of driver licenses to produce and deliver these products.

This bill eliminates the requirement for DMV to issue special restriction cards. All of the restriction information for a respective driver is currently available electronically to law enforcement and is accessible to the driver, in addition to other interested parties, through their driver record maintained by DMV. Other uses of the driver license, such as identity or age verification, do not require information on the driver's restrictions. This change would eliminate the need for a driver to retain a set of cards, while at the same time would reduce DMV expenses. An online tool for drivers to verify license information is currently available, where information on a driver's restrictions could be provided at no cost.



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DATE: May 27, 2015

TO: Members, Senate Committee on Transportation and Veterans Affairs
The Honorable Jerry Petrowski, Chair

FROM: Tom Rhatican, Assistant Deputy Secretary, Wisconsin Department of Transportation

SUBJECT: Senate Bill 156 (stopping, standing, and parking of emergency vehicles)

Chairman Petrowski and Committee Members:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify in support of Wisconsin Senate Bill 156 (SB 156). SB 156 relates to the application of stopping, standing, and parking provisions to certain authorized emergency vehicles.

Under current law, if an audible or visual signal, or both, is given by an operator of an authorized emergency vehicle, the operator is exempt from certain traffic restrictions when the operator is responding to an emergency or is in pursuit of an actual or suspected violator of the law. One of these exemptions is when the operator of an authorized emergency vehicle is stopped, standing or parked. This exemption, however, only applies when the operator of the authorized emergency vehicle activates their warning lights.

Without regard to how many emergency vehicles are at the scene of an incident, current law requires each emergency vehicle that is stopped, standing or parked in the restricted area to activate the vehicle's warning lights. SB 156 eliminates the requirement that an authorized emergency vehicle's warning lights be activated as a condition of being exempt from traffic restrictions related to stopping, standing and parking.

The requirement in current law that the operators of emergency vehicles activate their warning lights, at times, jeopardizes the safety of law enforcement personnel and the traveling public. When warning lights are activated, the focus of the majority of motorists is directed at the lights of the emergency vehicle and not on the roadway, which leads to fewer attentive motorists traveling on the roadway. In addition, excessive lights can be distracting and confusing, which also poses a safety risk to motorists on the roadway.

An emergency vehicle's audible and visual signals are not essential for some law enforcement activities, such as attempting to locate vehicles, directing traffic, or assisting motorists observe traffic conditions. This change to existing law will allow emergency vehicles to stop, stand or park without activating their warning lights, while still maintaining the exemption from existing traffic restrictions; leading to a safer traveling environment for both law enforcement personnel and the general public.

If you have any questions, please contact me or Nate Yahn, WisDOT legislative advisor, at (608) 266-1114.