



**House
Legislative
Analysis
Section**

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EXPAND SCHOOL BUS USE OF STROBE LIGHTS

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House Bill 5291 as passed by the House
Second Analysis (7-9-90)

Sponsor: Rep. James M. Middaugh
House Committee: Transportation
Senate Committee: State Affairs, Tourism &
Transportation

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

The Vehicle Code limits the use of strobe lights (a white, intermittent flashing light) on school buses to certain situations, including inclement weather conditions, such as in fog, or in certain driving situations, such as when students are being picked up or dropped off. Some people believe this law overlooks the fact that school buses often transport children at nighttime (for instance, on field trips or other school-related functions) when visibility may be lower than that experienced during bad weather, and feel the act should be amended to specifically allow strobes to be used anytime between the hours of sunset and sunrise.

The act also specifies what types of vehicles are allowed to use amber flashing lights for safety reasons, and the list currently includes, among others, vehicles used by rural mail carriers. Some would like this authorization extended to drivers of other types of vehicles who often must stop near or at the roadside when working from their vehicles.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend the Vehicle Code to add that strobe lights could be used by a school bus driver at any time between the hours of sunset and sunrise. Also, the bill specifies that the driver of a vehicle used to collect or haul trash or a person under contract to deliver newspapers or other publications in rural areas could use amber flashing lights on his or her vehicle.

MCL 257.698

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

According to the Department of Education, the bill would not affect state or local expenditures. (7-5-90)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The white strobe lights used on school buses are effective in calling attention to these vehicles and their precious cargo, and this benefit should not be limited only to times of bad weather or the loading or unloading of pupils. The bill would extend the use of strobe lights on buses to any time between the hours of sunset and sunrise and thus would give school bus drivers transporting children during nighttime hours (such as on extended field trips or for evening athletic events) the option to use them when visibility is low due to darkness.

Against:

Allowing use of strobes during hours of darkness could be dangerous to other motorists (and to school buses themselves) as the bright light emitted by these could blind

other drivers, especially drivers of larger vehicles who sit up high off the ground. Strobes are effective during daylight hours precisely because their brightness is somewhat muted by the relatively bright surrounding daylight. If used at night, the bright, flickering, white light could momentarily blind nearby drivers. Further, drivers could be confused into thinking a bus with a flashing strobe was actually an emergency vehicle (as the darkness would make it difficult to distinguish between different types of vehicles) which could cause motorists to react in a way that might endanger other traffic. Besides, other lights currently used by buses at night are relatively bright and can easily be seen during the hours of darkness.

For:

Permitting amber flashers to be used on vehicles driven by rural newspaper carriers and trash haulers would enhance safety both for the drivers of these types of vehicles and for other nearby drivers. The act currently allows use of amber flashers by rural mail carriers and should be expanded to also apply to these other types of vehicles that have to stop often along the roadside while working.

Response: There has yet been no demonstrated need for allowing use of amber lights by these other vehicles. Adding other types of vehicles that can use the lights would only serve to confuse the public.

POSITIONS:

The Department of State Police supports the bill. (7-9-90)

The Department of Education supports the bill. (7-5-90)

H.B. 5291 (7-9-90)