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VISIBILITY OF CERT. VEHICLES

House Bill 4665 as introduced
First Analysis (5-9-95)

Sponsor: Rep. Kim Rhead
Committee: Transportation

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

The Michigan Vehicle Code currently requires certain slow-moving vehicles to be equipped with at least one "lamp or lantern" on the front that emits a white light visible 500 feet from a vehicle's front and a lamp or lantern on the rear that emits a red light visible from 300 feet to its back. These lights must be lit only during darkness or other times of low visibility. Although accidents involving cars and horse-and-buggies have been relatively rare in Michigan, two such accidents are reported to have occurred in Sanilac County since 1993, one of which resulted in the deaths of an Amish mother and her child. (The other accident, in which no one was seriously hurt, reportedly occurred in April.) Some people believe tragic accidents like this could be better prevented if slow-moving vehicles such as the type used by the Amish were required to have rear lights that could be seen by on-coming drivers at least 500 feet behind them.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend the Michigan Vehicle Code to specify that the red lamp used on the back of certain slow-moving vehicles would have to be visible from at least 500 feet from behind the vehicle, rather than from 300 feet from its rear (as specified under current law).

MCL 257.695

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

The House Fiscal Agency says the bill would not affect state or local budget expenditures. (5-1-95)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

A November 1993 accident in Sanilac County (in Michigan's "thumb" area) involving a horse-and-buggy and a motor vehicle resulted in the deaths of an Amish woman and her child, and a similar

accident occurred in the same area recently, although no one was seriously hurt. These incidents point to the dangers involved when slow-moving vehicles, especially ones that provide little protection if a collision occurs, share the road with higher-speed motor vehicles. The bill would help to prevent such tragedies by strengthening the requirement for slow-moving vehicles to have lights on during hours of low visibility or at night. Under the bill, the red light on the rear of such vehicles would have to be brighter, and thus visible from 500 feet behind, rather than 300 feet. The bill would make Michigan's law regarding the use of lights on such vehicles during hours of poor visibility more closely resemble laws of other states with even larger Amish populations (for instance, Indiana).

Response:

As pointed out in the House Transportation Committee, the bill could be more effective in establishing a uniform requirement for such lights by specifying that they would have to emit a certain candle strength. Also, it should be noted that at least one state, Ohio, currently requires that lights be visible on such vehicles during hours of poor visibility from at least 1,000 feet from both the front and rear.

POSITIONS:

The Department of State Police supports the bill. (5-8-95)

A spokeswoman for Marlette Township, in Sanilac County, testified before the House Transportation Committee in support of the bill. (5-4-95)

The Department of State was neutral on a similar bill (House Bill 5201) from the 1993-94 legislative session, and has not yet taken a formal position on the bill. (5-8-95)

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