

Public Safety and Security Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-7204

AN ACT CONCERNING LIGHTS ON VEHICLES, PENALTIES FOR VIOLATIONS OF CERTAIN STATUTES, STOPS AND SEARCHES, A PHLEBOTOMY PROGRAM STUDY, INSPECTIONS OF CERTAIN VEHICLES, TRAFFIC SAFETY CORRIDORS, A PILOT PROGRAM TO EQUIP POLICE VEHICLES WITH CERTAIN DEVICES AND POLICE REVIEW OF CERTAIN

Title: RECORDINGS.

Vote Date: 3/18/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/11/2025

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

[Rep. Jill Barry, 31st Dist.](#)

[Rep. Christopher Poulos, 81st Dist.](#)

[Rep. Irene M. Haines, 34th Dist.](#)

[Rep. John Santanella, 58th Dist.](#)

[Rep. Michael D. Quinn, 82nd Dist.](#)

[Rep. Hector Arzeno, 151st Dist.](#)

[Rep. Patrick S. Boyd, 50th Dist.](#)

[Rep. Kerry S. Wood, 29th Dist.](#)

[Rep. Ronald A. Napoli, 73rd Dist.](#)

[Rep. Joseph P. Gresko, 121st Dist.](#)

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill makes modifications to various traffic safety laws – these are enumerated below along with their purpose:

1. This legislation permits certain emergency personnel and tow trucks to use 'steady blue and red lights'. On the job safety concerns were the precipitating motive underpinning this legislation. The use of these lights is meant to provide these individuals with greater visibility, informing motorists of their presence so they can adequately avoid them.
2. Modify penalties for certain motor vehicle statutes. Conditions on the road have become more dangerous due to an uptick in reckless driving – making certain penalties harsher is meant to act as a deterrent against these types of behaviors.

3. This bill eliminates certain provisions in relation to cannabis stops – this allows law enforcement greater ability to ensure safety on roadways.
4. A pilot program is to be initiated to "study the feasibility of a permeant law enforcement phlebotomy program." If police officers have the ability to conduct blood tests on the road, instead of at the station, these tests can be streamlined and potentially more accurate.
5. This bill requires safety inspections of vehicles used by law enforcement – the safety of each member of law enforcement is paramount, this legislation seeks to address that.
6. This bill establishes a traffic safety corridor program. Accidents in the state are increasing in number and intensity, this program is designed to help safety personnel identify accident prone areas on the interstate and install a traffic safety corridor to notify motorists in regard to these high accident zones.
7. The bill establishes a program to equip police vehicles with certain Global Positioning System (GPS) technologies. High speed pursuits present a danger to both the officers involved and to motorists in the vicinity. GPS tracking would give these officers the ability to monitor a suspect without necessarily being forced to continue a dangerous pursuit.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

Section 12 was removed from the proposed legislation.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Ronnell Higgins, Commissioner, Department of Emergency Services & Public Protection, Supports:

Commissioner Higgins notes his support for three sections of this proposed legislation. In section 8 commissioner Higgins state that they are currently municipal departments participating in phlebotomy training.

Section 10 to improve public safety on highways across the state. This legislation would allow the commission to use data-driven insights to identify areas where high risk accidents are prone to occur. Through traffic corridors, DESPP hopes to mitigate the potential for these accidents.

Section 11 of the legislation he sees the utility, from a public safety perspective, in using Global Positioning Systems (GPS) to identify reckless driving. This will reduce the need for officers to pursue these individuals, which ameliorates officer and motorist safety. Comm'r. Higgins qualifies DESPP's support, expressing that the agency does not have the resources to properly implement this program at the moment.

Garrett Eucalitto, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Supports:

Commissioner Eucalitto commented on this legislation specifically, Section 8 and 10. CTDOT states that the study proposed in Section 8 of HB-7204 would be redundant of the work already completed when they worked with CPCA, DESPP and the municipal police to launch a law enforcement phlebotomy pilot program in CT in 2024. Reports and the overview of this current program is tracked through the Highway Safety Office and can be shared with municipal and state agencies. Therefore, CTDOT does not think an additional study is necessary. CTDOT is supportive of the intent of Section 10, due to the safety concerns on

Connecticut's highways and if this concept were to move along CTDOT would need to work with proponents and federal agencies. Ensuring proposed signage conforms to federal traffic control standards and the timing of enforced efforts in the proposed safety corridors. The Commissioner also attached the first and second Report on Progress and Recommendations of the Working Groups on Electronic Warrant and Oral Fluid Pilot Programs for reference.

External Affairs, CT Judicial Branch, General Comments:

The Judicial Branch notes certain inconsistencies in the proposed legislation which would impact its ability to implement the proposed changes. The Judicial Branch takes issue with the classification of crimes involving 'negligent homicide' and 'misconduct with a motor vehicle'. In the proposed legislation, both crimes would be classified as Class C felonies. Furthermore, manslaughter is also classified as a Class C felony. The Judicial Branch notes the inconsistency with classifying simple negligence (negligent homicide), criminal negligence (misconduct with a motor vehicle) and manslaughter in the same category. Considering the differing levels of severity associated with these types of crimes, it is confusing that they are all classified as the same level of felony. The Judicial Branch also asks for clarification "regarding the mandatory minimum for the death of a police officer.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Irene Haines, State Representative 44th Dist., Connecticut General Assembly

State Representative Haines is in support of this bill but suggested adding language to include further penalties to 'super speeders' on the roads, giving examples of penalties that could be included. Rep. Haines stated that these penalties would not be litigated, therefore, they would not be burdening our judiciary system.

Chris Poulos, State Representative 81st Dist., Connecticut General Assembly shared State Representative Poulos support Section 10, which will make crucial steps in addressing the high rates of motor vehicle accidents. These traffic safety corridors have been seen in other states making roads safer for all drivers, passengers, and pedestrians. Also, the increase in fines for violations in these corridors will serve as a deterrent to dangerous driving behaviors. Enhanced law enforcement presence within these areas will work together to prevent tragedies and improve response time to accidents in high-risk areas. All of these will work together to serve the collective goal to make the roads safer for all.

Paul Januszewski, President, Connecticut Career Fire Chiefs Association, General Comments:

Paul Januszewski offers his support for amending Connecticut General Statutes to permit fire personnel to use "cruise lights" in the performance of their duties. Since 2019, police officers have been the only drivers on the road that are permitted to use cruise lights. Januszewski believes that this permission should be extended back to fire personnel for public safety and security reasons. Januszewski offers statutory language in his testimony as an example of how this language could be re-introduced.

Paul Paniccia, Supports:

Paul Paniccia offers support for the portion of this legislation that provides for the creation of traffic corridors. Paniccia notes an incident where a state trooper, and a Department of

Transportation employee tragically lost their lives to emphasize why traffic corridors are vital. The installation of these corridors would make drivers aware of potential high accident zones with the hope of reducing the types of fatalities Paniccia describes.

Rep. Carrie Wood, State Representative, 29th District, Connecticut General Assembly:

Representative Wood notes that February 2025, between exits twenty-three and twenty-four on I-91, was the 'most violent' month for that stretch of highway. In general, high-speed, violent accidents, and dangerous driving in general, are on the rise throughout Connecticut. For this reason, Rep. Wood strongly supports provisions which establish traffic safety corridors, and give greater enforcement powers to police officers. Rep. Wood also notes the rising insurance costs resulting from the aforementioned trend.

Dave Yaccarino, State Representative 87th Dist., Connecticut General Assembly

supports this bill specifically Section 1 (a) and (k). Allowing operators to use blue light under narrow circumstances will help prevent accidents and protect those who work on Connecticut roadways. Citing a personal example, of previous experience as a tow truck driver.

Testifiers expressed their support for the proposal to allow tow trucks to utilize blue lights. These individuals note that tow truck drivers are often placed into dangerous situations where they could be seriously harmed by a motorist who is not paying attention. These testifiers contend that motorists are more apt to pay attention to blue lights since they associate these vehicles with emergency situations. These individuals cite studies from multiple state Department of Transportations as evidence that blue lights are effective for this purpose.

Alec Slatky, Managing Director of Public and Government Affairs, AAA Northeast
Salena Kahn, Tow Operator

Multiple testifiers representing various police organizations around the state are testifying in support of the proposed legislation. They believe the provisions included in the bill will enhance both driver and officer safety by establishing programs like traffic corridors, enhanced monitoring of reckless driving etc. These provisions are meant to reduce the likelihood of catastrophic accidents by identifying and reducing hazards on the road. The bill also intends to reduce the number of dangerous situations that officers are placed into.

Florencio Cotto, Police Officers Association of Connecticut (POACT), Supports:
Chief L.J. Fusaro, Connecticut Police Chiefs Association, Supports

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Deborah Del Prete Sullivan, Legal Counsel, Office of Chief Public Defender is opposed to Sections 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 11. Outlining why these need to be deleted, Section 2 elevates traditional minor offenses into an offense that is subject to incarceration. Section 3, 5 and 6 will leave courts with no other choice than to enforce the mandatory minimums. Section 7 will have a disparate impact on communities of color with odor-based stops. Section 11 because it is unconstitutional for the police to place a GPS system into a vehicle without a warrant. The Office of Chief Public Defender respectfully requested that these Sections be removed from the bill.

John Carew, Legislative Consultant, Connecticut State Firefighters Association,
Opposes:

John Carrew is testifying in opposition to the proposed legislation on behalf of the Connecticut State Firefighters Association (CSFA). CSFA is concerned about the expansion of blue lights to non-emergency vehicles. They believe that these lights have traditionally been a conspicuous signal to drivers on the road, notifying them when an emergency vehicle is approaching. If other vehicles were permitted to have these lights, drivers may become confused which has implications for traffic safety.

Richard Taff, Attorney, General Comments:

Atty. Taff is concerned about some of the language changes made in this bill. Like the Judicial Branch, Atty. Taff expresses unease about the restructuring of certain criminal penalties - specifically in Section 6, certain crimes that are disproportionate from one another in severity would all be classified as Class C felonies. Atty. Taff also questions the utility of escalating penalties for certain crimes – he believes these harsher penalties could have unintended consequences and proposes that 'public education' may be a better solution.

Jess Zaccagnino, Policy Counsel, ACLU-CT, Opposes:

Jess Zaccagnino is testifying in opposition to the proposed legislation on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union Connecticut (ACLU-CT). ACLU-CT believes this bill will have unintended consequences – it would introduce new individuals to the criminal justice system pipeline without actually deterring people from dangerous driving. ACLU-CT is also concerned that minorities would be stopped at a disproportionate rate, violating their civil liberties. ACLU-CT is opposed to using roadside phlebotomy tests to determine a driver's impairment. They highlight the inaccuracies of this test – a driver may not currently be impaired but still tests positive due to prior consumption of a substance sometimes days earlier. ACLU-CT protests the language change which modifies the phrase 'uses of force' to 'incidents'.

A couple individuals offered general comments in response to the proposed legislation. These individuals oppose the regulation that allows wreckers to utilize blue lights – they do not see the efficacy from a safety standpoint, and warn against potential hazards and scams that could result from these provisions. They point to the possibility that 'unscrupulous towers' may pretend to be affiliated with law enforcement, when, in reality, they are trying to scam the accident victim. These individuals do, however, support the use of GPS to aid law enforcement in apprehending dangerous fleeing vehicles. This technology would allow police to end a dangerous pursuit while still being able to track, and hopefully apprehend, the perpetrator.

Eric George, President, IAC, General Comments

Howard Handler, Senior Director, NICB, General Comments

Various cannabis advocates testified in opposition to the proposed legislation. Specifically, the provision that permits officers to search individuals' cars based on the odor of cannabis is of particular concern. These individuals argue that odor alone is not necessarily an indication that someone is driving under the influence of cannabis. Multiple testifiers fear that residual odor will lead to unjustified traffic stops and violations of their constitutional rights. Furthermore, they note the disparate impact that this legislation could have on certain minority groups and medical cannabis patients. Ultimately, this legislation could result in reduced sense of trust between police and the larger community.

Joseph Accettullo, Co-Founder, CT Cannawarriors, Opposes

DeAndre Brown, BLM860

Christina Capitan, CT Cannawarriors, Opposes

Ivelisse Correa Brown, BLM860

Anonymous, CT Cannawarriors, Opposes

Josiah Schlee, CT Cannawarriors, Opposes

Melissa Maichack, President, T.H.E Movement, Opposes:

Ann Marie Rosado, Owner, Higher Health, Opposes

Olivia Rinkes, Opposes

Duncan Markovich, Owner and Founder, Better Ways LLC

Tanya Stone

Reported by: Derrick Arnold

Date: 3/31/25