
OLR Bill Analysis

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 AND A PILOT PROGRAM TO EQUIP POLICE VEHICLES WITH CERTAIN DEVICES.

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

[TABLE OF CONTENTS:](#)

[SUMMARY](#)

[§ 1 — FLASHING AND STEADY LIGHTS](#)

Allows wreckers to use steady blue lights and any combination of steady or flashing yellow and amber lights; limits the use of these lights to times while the wrecker is stationary; allows fire and emergency medical service personnel to use steady lights in the colors they can use under existing law for flashing lights

[§§ 2-6 — INCREASED PENALTIES](#)

Increases the penalties for various motor vehicle-related violations, including by increasing the maximum fine amounts, criminalizing certain violations, and requiring mandatory minimums for others

[§ 7 — CANNABIS ODOR](#)

Allows certain circumstances (e.g., odor of cannabis) to be used to support a stop or search of a person or motor vehicle

[§ 8 — PHLEBOTOMY FEASIBILITY STUDY](#)

Requires the DESPP and DOT commissioners to jointly conduct a feasibility study on implementing a permanent statewide law enforcement phlebotomy program to combat impaired driving

[§ 9 — SAFETY VEHICLE INSPECTIONS](#)

Requires the DMV to annually conduct safety inspections on vehicles used by Connecticut law enforcement units

[§ 10 — TRAFFIC SAFETY CORRIDORS](#)

Requires the (1) DOT commissioner to establish and designate parts of a highway with high rates of motor vehicle accidents as traffic safety corridors and (2) Superior Court to double the base fine of certain violations

[§ 11 — POLICE USE OF GPS PILOT PROGRAM](#)

Requires DESPP to establish a one-year pilot program to allow three municipal police departments to install a device on their police vehicles that allows a police officer to launch a GPS onto another vehicle

BACKGROUND

SUMMARY

This bill makes various unrelated changes to motor vehicle-related laws. It also requires annual inspection of certain law enforcement vehicles and establishes a pilot program to allow police officers to launch a global positioning system (GPS) on another vehicle.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2025, unless otherwise noted

§ 1 — FLASHING AND STEADY LIGHTS

Allows wreckers to use steady blue lights and any combination of steady or flashing yellow and amber lights; limits the use of these lights to times while the wrecker is stationary; allows fire and emergency medical service personnel to use steady lights in the colors they can use under existing law for flashing lights

By law, registered wreckers may use steady or flashing yellow or amber lights while operating on the road or while stationary. The bill additionally allows them to use steady blue lights and specifies that they may use a combination of yellow and amber lights. However, it limits the use of all of these lights (yellow, amber, and blue) to times when the vehicle is stationary.

It also allows fire and emergency medical service personnel who are authorized to use flashing blue or red lights under existing law to also use steady lights in those colors. Under current law, only police officers and Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) inspectors operating a state or local police vehicle may use steady red, blue, or red and blue lights, visible from the vehicle's front; the bill eliminates this restriction.

The bill also makes technical and conforming changes.

§§ 2-6 — INCREASED PENALTIES

Increases the penalties for various motor vehicle-related violations, including by increasing the maximum fine amounts, criminalizing certain violations, and requiring mandatory minimums for others

The bill increases the penalties for various motor vehicle-related

violations. It increases the maximum fine amounts, criminalizes certain violations, and requires mandatory minimums for others.

Obstructed or Tinted Windows (§ 2)

The bill criminalizes the following violations by subjecting them to the penalties for reckless driving:

1. operating a vehicle with an object obstructing the operator's view of the road or with a tinted windshield in violation of state law;
2. selling, offering for sale, or delivering a motor vehicle in Connecticut with a tinted windshield or window in violation of state law; and
3. failing to present a vehicle to DMV by July 1, 2026, to receive and put a sticker on any aftermarket tinted window to indicate compliance with the law.

The penalty for reckless driving is (1) a fine of between \$100 and \$300, up to 30 days imprisonment, or both, for a first offense, and (2) a fine of up to \$600, up to one year imprisonment, or both, for subsequent offenses. Under current law, these obstructed or tinted window violations are infractions.

The bill also makes technical and conforming changes.

Negligent Operation of a Vehicle (§ 3)

The bill increases the maximum penalty for negligently operating a motor vehicle that causes the death of another person. It does so by increasing the penalty from a fine of up to \$3,000, up to three years imprisonment, or both, to a class C felony, which is punishable by up to 10 years imprisonment, up to a \$10,000 fine, or both.

Failure to Stop for and Evading a Police Officer (§ 4)

The bill also increases the maximum penalties for failing to stop for or obey a police officer and attempting to evade a police officer.

It increases, from an infraction to a class A misdemeanor (punishable by up to 364 days imprisonment, up to a \$2,000 fine, or both), the penalty

for failing to stop a motor vehicle upon a uniformed officer's signal or disobeying the officer about operating the vehicle.

It also increases, from a class A misdemeanor to a class D felony (punishable by up to five years imprisonment, up to a \$5,000 fine, or both), the penalty for increasing a vehicle's speed in an attempt to escape or elude a police officer after being signaled to stop.

Evasion of Responsibility in Operating Motor Vehicle (§ 5)

Under existing law, a driver knowingly involved in an accident that causes serious physical injury to or the death of another person must immediately stop; render necessary aid; and give his or her name, address, and driver's license and registration information to the injured person, a police officer, or a person who witnessed the death or serious injury. If unable to do so for any reason, the driver must immediately report the death or serious injury and provide the required information to law enforcement along with the location and circumstances of the accident.

Under current law, anyone who violates these requirements is guilty of a class B felony, which is punishable by up to 20 years imprisonment, up to a \$15,000 fine, or both. The bill imposes a mandatory minimum sentence of five years for violations.

Existing law imposes substantially similar requirements for operators who cause any physical injury, whether or not it is serious. Currently violations of these requirements are a class D felony. The bill imposes a mandatory minimum sentence of two years for these violations.

Misconduct with a Motor Vehicle (§6)

The bill increases the penalty for misconduct with a motor vehicle from a class D felony to a class C felony, with a (1) five-year mandatory minimum sentence or (2) 10-year mandatory minimum sentence if the person causes the death of a police officer.

By law and for this provision, "police officers" are sworn members of an organized local police department or the State Police; appointed

constables who perform criminal law enforcement duties; special police officers appointed under law (e.g., public assistance fraud investigators); or any members of a law enforcement unit who perform police duties (CGS § 7-294a(9)).

§ 7 — CANNABIS ODOR

Allows certain circumstances (e.g., odor of cannabis) to be used to support a stop or search of a person or motor vehicle

The bill eliminates the provision in current law prohibiting the following circumstances from constituting probable cause or reasonable suspicion or being used as the basis to support any stop or search of a person or motor vehicle:

1. the possession or suspected possession of up to five ounces of cannabis plant material (or an equivalent amount of cannabis products or combination of cannabis and cannabis products);
2. the presence of cash or currency near the cannabis, unless there is evidence that the cash or currency exceeds \$500; or
3. the odor of cannabis or burnt cannabis.

The bill retains a provision in existing law explicitly allowing law enforcement officers to conduct a test for impairment based on cannabis odor if the officer reasonably suspects that a motor vehicle's operator or passenger is violating the impaired driving laws. The bill also makes a conforming change.

§ 8 — PHLEBOTOMY FEASIBILITY STUDY

Requires the DESPP and DOT commissioners to jointly conduct a feasibility study on implementing a permanent statewide law enforcement phlebotomy program to combat impaired driving

The bill requires the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) and Department of Transportation (DOT) commissioners to jointly study the feasibility of implementing a permanent statewide law enforcement phlebotomy program to combat impaired driving.

The study must include an examination of:

1. best practices for (a) making phlebotomy training available to police officers and (b) providing educational materials to and answering questions from police officers on the training and police liability; and
2. phlebotomy programs and procedures law enforcement units use in other states.

Under the bill, DESPP and DOT must report the study's findings and any legislative recommendations to the Public Safety and Transportation committees by January 1, 2026.

§ 9 — SAFETY VEHICLE INSPECTIONS

Requires the DMV to annually conduct safety inspections on vehicles used by Connecticut law enforcement units

The bill requires the DMV, annually by July 1, 2026, and in consultation with DESPP, to conduct safety inspections on vehicles used by Connecticut law enforcement units to ensure each vehicle's safety and functionality. DMV must randomly select law enforcement units for the inspections. When the inspection is complete, DMV must report the inspection results to the law enforcement units whose vehicles were inspected.

By law and for this provision, a "law enforcement unit" is any state or municipal agency or department (or tribal agency or department created and governed under a memorandum of agreement) whose primary functions include enforcing criminal or traffic laws; preserving public order; protecting life and property; or preventing, detecting, or investigating crime (CGS § 7-294a(8)).

§ 10 — TRAFFIC SAFETY CORRIDORS

Requires the (1) DOT commissioner to establish and designate parts of a highway with high rates of motor vehicle accidents as traffic safety corridors and (2) Superior Court to double the base fine of certain violations

The bill requires the DOT commissioner, in consultation with the DESPP commissioner, to establish a traffic safety corridor program to (1) designate parts of a highway (i.e. public road) with high rates of motor vehicle accidents as traffic safety corridors, and (2) coordinate

motor vehicle enforcement in these corridors.

Under the bill, the Superior Court must double the base fine established or imposed for the violations listed in the table below. Most of the violations are infractions, which carry a base fine of between \$50 and \$90. Several of them have base fines greater than \$1,000. The highest fine is \$10,000 (for operating a school bus while impaired, or for negligent homicide with a motor vehicle, as amended by the bill).

Table: Motor Vehicle Violations with Additional Fines

Statute	Brief Description
14-213	Failure to carry a driver's license
14-213b	Operation of a motor vehicle without the statutorily required car insurance
14-214	Improper instruction of an unlicensed person in motor vehicle operation
14-215	Operation of a motor vehicle while registration or license is suspended
14-216	Operation of a motor vehicle by a person under age 18 without insurance
14-218a	Operation at unreasonable rate of speed
14-219	Speeding
14-220	Slow speed, impeding traffic; failure to use flashing lights
14-221	Operation of a low-speed vehicle carrying passengers for hire without a permit
14-222	Reckless driving
14-222a	Negligent homicide with a motor vehicle
14-223	Failure to obey signal of officer
14-224	Evading responsibility after a motor vehicle accident; operating a motor vehicle for racing contests, demonstrations of speed or skill, or street takeovers; not moving a vehicle after an accident
14-225	Evading responsibility for injury or damage when operating other vehicles
14-227a	Driving under the influence (DUI) of alcohol or drugs
14-227m	DUI with a child passenger
14-227n	DUI in a school bus
14-230	Failure to drive on the right
14-230a	Improper usage of left lane by commercial motor vehicles, school buses, buses, or vehicles with trailers
14-231	Failure to keep to right when meeting opposing traffic

Statute	Brief Description
14-232	Improper passing or failure to yield to passing vehicle
14-233	Passing on right
14-235	Failure to keep to right on curve or grade, or when approaching intersection
14-236	Failure to drive in proper lane on multiple-lane highway
14-237	Driving the wrong way on divided highway
14-238	Improper entry to or exit from controlled access highway
14-238a	Improper entry to limited access highway
14-239	Driving the wrong way on one-way highway or rotaries; failure to grant right of way to vehicle in rotary
14-240	Failure to drive a reasonable distance apart
14-240a	Failure to drive a reasonable distance apart with intent to harass or intimidate
14-241	Improper turn
14-242	Failure to give proper signal for a turn; failure to grant rights of way
14-243	Unsafe starting or backing of vehicle
14-244	Improper signaling for turns or stopping
14-245	Failure to grant right of way at an intersection
14-246a	Failure to grant right of way at a highway junction
14-247	Failure to yield when emerging from driveway or private road
14-247a	Failure to grant right of way when emerging from alley, driveway, or building
14-248a	Failure to reduce speed or stop at cattle crossing
14-249	Failure to obey signal at railroad crossing
14-250	Failure of commercial or public service motor vehicle to stop at railroad crossing
14-250a	Improper operation of motor vehicle on sidewalk
14-257	Improper seating of passengers
14-261	Improper distance between wrecker and towed vehicle; improper pushing of a vehicle
14-266	Operation of a vehicle of over four tons' capacity on restricted highway
14-271	Operation of a vehicle improperly loaded or constructed to carry load
14-273	Improper seating of passengers on a vehicle for which a passenger endorsement or passenger and school endorsement is required; exceeding capacity of said vehicle
14-279	Improper passing of a standing school bus

Statute	Brief Description
14-281a	Operation of school bus at excessive speed; failure to display lighted headlamps while transporting school children
14-283(e)	Failure to stop on right side of road
14-283(h)	Obstruction of an emergency vehicle
14-289a	Improper seating of self or passengers on motorcycle
14-289b	Improper operation of a motorcycle or auticycle
14-296aa	Distracted driving

Under the bill, DOT must post a sign at the beginning of each traffic safety corridor stating the fines are doubled and at the end stating the corridor has ended.

The bill also requires the State Police to enhance its enforcement efforts in each corridor.

§ 11 — POLICE USE OF GPS PILOT PROGRAM

Requires DESPP to establish a one-year pilot program to allow three municipal police departments to install a device on their police vehicles that allows a police officer to launch a GPS onto another vehicle

By October 1, 2025, the bill requires DESPP to establish a one-year pilot program to allow three municipal police departments to install a device on their police vehicles that allows a police officer to launch a GPS (presumably, a GPS tracking device) onto another vehicle (see BACKGROUND). DESPP may provide grants-in-aid to implement the program.

Each participating police department must submit a report on the utilization of the devices to DESPP. By January 1, 2027, DESPP must submit a report to the Public Safety and Security and Judiciary committees. The report must include a summary of the pilot program results and any recommendations for future utilization of the device.

BACKGROUND

Related Court Cases

In *U.S. v. Jones*, the U.S. Supreme Court held that placing a GPS tracking device on someone's vehicle constitutes a "search" within the

meaning of the Fourth Amendment, which prohibits unreasonable searches (565 U.S. 400 (2012)). Although the Court in that case did not rule on whether a warrant is required for police to place a GPS on a person, the Third Circuit Court of Appeals subsequently held that law enforcement agents must have a warrant based on probable cause to attach a GPS to a car to track its movements (*U.S. v. Katzin*, 769 F.3d 163 (3d Cir. 2014)).

COMMITTEE ACTION

Public Safety and Security Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 29 Nay 0 (03/18/2025)