
OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 1375

AN ACT CONCERNING HIGHWAY, PEDESTRIAN AND CYCLIST SAFETY.

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BACKGROUND

SUMMARY

This bill makes various changes related to open alcoholic beverage containers in motor vehicles, helmet requirements, distracted driving, reckless driving, failure to yield to pedestrians, left lane driving, adaptive e-bikes, and Complete Streets.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2025, except the (1) Connecticut Hydrogen and Electric Automobile Purchase Rebate (CHEAPR) and Complete Streets provisions are effective July 1, 2025, and (2) speed assistance device study is effective upon passage.

§ 1 — FAILURE TO YIELD TO PEDESTRIANS

Increases, from \$500 to \$750, the penalty for failure to yield to pedestrians and other related violations

The bill increases, from \$500 to \$750, the maximum fine for drivers who:

1. fail to yield (or slow down and stop if necessary) to a pedestrian who is crossing the roadway within a crosswalk or is at the curb indicating intent to cross;
2. pass a vehicle that is stopped at a crosswalk to allow a pedestrian to cross; or
3. fail to slow down when approaching and yield to a pedestrian (a) who is blind and carrying a white cane or a red tipped white cane or (b) being guided by a service animal.

§ 2 — DRIVING IN EXTREME LEFT LANE ON LIMITED ACCESS HIGHWAYS

Extends prohibition on driving in the extreme left lane on limited access highways with more than two lanes going in the same direction to all vehicles, with certain exceptions

By law, all vehicles must be driven on the right, with certain exceptions such as passing and on highways divided into three or more lanes (CGS § 14-230(a)).

Current law prohibits, with certain exceptions, motor vehicles with commercial registrations, motor buses, vehicles with trailers, and school buses from driving in the extreme left lane on limited access highways with three or more lanes going in the same direction. The bill prohibits driving any other motor vehicle in the extreme left lane on these highways.

The bill's prohibition does not apply to vehicles driving in the extreme left lane (1) to pass; (2) on a police officer's direction; (3) when the entrance or exit is on the right (only for the time period necessary to enter or exit); (4) when the vehicle is an emergency vehicle; (5) when maintaining, repairing, or constructing the highway; or (5) when traffic congestion makes it necessary. It also does not apply to emergency vehicles. Under current law, the prohibition on vehicles with commercial registration and other vehicles does not apply (1) when directed to drive in the extreme left by a police officer or (2) when the entrance or exit is on the left (only for the necessary time period).

Violations of the bill's prohibition are infractions, subject to a fine of \$85.

§ 3 — MOTORCYCLE HELMETS

Increases, from age 18 to 21, the age under which all motorcycle and motor-driven cycle drivers and passengers must wear a helmet

The bill increases, from age 18 to 21, the age under which all motorcycle and motor-driven cycle drivers and passengers must wear a helmet meeting federal helmet safety standards. Current law only requires helmets for (1) drivers and passengers under age 18 and (2) motorcycle instruction permit holders of any age (CGS § 14-40a).

Under the bill, as under existing law, violations of the helmet requirement are infractions (see BACKGROUND) and subject to the \$90

fine that applies under current law to drivers and passengers under age 18. By law, unchanged by the bill, a first offense by a motorcycle instruction permit holder is an infraction and subject to a \$50 fine, and a subsequent offense is a class D misdemeanor, subject to a fine of up to \$250, up to 30 days in prison, or both.

By law, a motor-driven cycle is a motorcycle, motor scooter, or bicycle with an attached motor (except an electric bicycle) that has a (1) seat height of at least 26 inches and (2) motor with a piston displacement under 50 cubic centimeters (cc). As under current law, the helmet requirement does not apply to autocycles.

§ 4 — DISTRACTED DRIVING

Modifies the distracted driving law by explicitly prohibiting watching or playing a video while driving, including on an installed screen or other visual display

The bill modifies the distracted driving law by explicitly prohibiting watching or playing a video on a mobile electronic device while driving. It also expands the definition of “mobile electronic device” to include any installed screen, monitor, or other visual display.

As under existing law, mobile electronic device also includes handheld or portable electronic equipment capable of providing data communication between two or more people, including (1) a text messaging device, a paging device, a personal digital assistant, or a laptop computer; (2) equipment that plays video games or digital video disks; and (3) equipment that takes or transmits digital photos. It does not include audio equipment or equipment installed to provide navigation, emergency assistance to the driver, or video entertainment to rear passengers.

By law, the fine for distracted driving is (1) \$200 for the first violation, (2) \$375 for the second violation, and (3) \$625 for the third or subsequent violation.

§ 5 — OPEN CONTAINERS IN MOTOR VEHICLES

Generally prohibits drinking from or possessing an open alcoholic beverage container in a motor vehicle’s passenger area, with exceptions for for-hire transportation and RVs

The bill prohibits consuming or possessing an open alcoholic

beverage container in a motor vehicle's "passenger area" while the vehicle is on a public road. An open alcoholic beverage container is a bottle, can, or other receptacle that contains an alcoholic beverage and is either (1) open or has a broken seal or (2) partially empty. Under federal law, states must adopt an open container prohibition or face fiscal penalties (see BACKGROUND).

The bill's prohibition does not apply to passengers in (1) vehicles designed, maintained, and primarily used as for-hire passenger transportation, including taxis, motor buses, and livery vehicles (e.g., limousines) or (2) a recreational vehicle's (RV) living quarters.

Violations of the bill's provisions are infractions (see BACKGROUND). Under existing law, drivers who drink an alcoholic beverage while driving are guilty of a class C misdemeanor (punishable by up to three months in prison, a fine of up to \$500, or both) (CGS § 53a-213).

Passenger Area

The bill's open container prohibition applies to occupants of a vehicle's passenger area, which is (1) the area designed to seat the driver and any passenger while the vehicle is moving and (2) any area that is readily accessible to the driver or a passenger while sitting. It does not include (1) locked containers (such as glove compartments or consoles); (2) the trunk; or (3) in motor vehicles without trunks, the area behind the last upright seat or any area not normally occupied by a driver or passenger.

§ 6 — HELMET REQUIREMENTS FOR CHILDREN RIDING BICYCLES AND SIMILAR VEHICLES

Increases, from age 16 to age 18, the age under which children must wear a helmet while riding a bicycle, electric bicycle, nonmotorized scooter, skateboard, or electric foot scooter or while using roller skates or roller blades

The bill increases, from age 16 to age 18, the age under which children must wear a helmet while (1) riding a bicycle, electric bicycle, nonmotorized scooter, skateboard, or electric foot scooter or (2) using roller skates or roller blades.

Under existing law, unchanged by the bill, this requirement applies while riding these vehicles on the traveled portion of a road and at any park or skateboarding park. As under existing law, helmets must meet the minimum specifications established by the American National Standards Institute, the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission, the American Society for Testing and Materials or the Snell Memorial Foundation's Standard for Protective Headgear for Use in Bicycling.

By law, failure to wear a helmet is not considered a violation or an offense and cannot be considered contributory negligence by a parent or a child or be admissible in any civil action. Law enforcement officers may issue a verbal warning to a child's parent or guardian that the child is not complying with the requirement.

§ 7 — COMPLETE STREETS IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT

Requires DOT to assign employees to support the adoption of Complete Streets standards or policies throughout the state

The bill requires the Department of Transportation (DOT) to assign employees to support the adoption of Complete Streets standards or policies throughout the state. The support must include administering grants and giving incentives to municipalities to finalize projects or prioritization plans that incorporate Complete Streets standards or policies.

The federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, defines Complete Streets standards or policies as those that ensure the safe and adequate accommodation of all users of the transportation system, including pedestrians, bicyclists, public transportation users, children, older individuals, individuals with disabilities, motorists, and freight vehicles (P.L. 117-58, § 11206). IIJA requires states and metropolitan planning organizations to use a portion of their planning and research funds for Complete Streets activities.

§ 8 — INTELLIGENT SPEED ASSISTANCE DEVICES STUDY

Requires the Vision Zero Council and the chief state's attorney to jointly study, and make recommendations on, the feasibility of addressing speeding and reckless driving with intelligent speed assistance devices

The bill requires the Vision Zero Council (see BACKGROUND) and the chief state's attorney to jointly study, and make recommendations on, the feasibility of addressing speeding and reckless driving with devices that actively monitor and limit a vehicle's speed based on the speed limit where the vehicle is being operated (i.e. intelligent speed assistance devices). In preparing the study, the bill allows them to partner with a higher education institution or national transportation research entity. They must submit their findings and recommendations to the Transportation Committee by January 15, 2026.

Under the bill, the study must, at a minimum:

1. determine if there is enough evidence to show whether the devices change driving behavior and improve road safety;
2. consider the different types of devices and their availability, as well as estimate installation and maintenance costs to the driver and to the state; and
3. examine the devices' accuracy and reliability in unsupervised environments and whether they can produce evidence that they have not been bypassed, circumvented, or tampered with.

If the study recommends using the devices in the state, it must also:

1. identify whether installing the device would be (a) mandatory or discretionary and (b) instead of, or in addition to, a penalty or license suspension;
2. indicate the types and number of violations that would require or permit use of the device;
3. discuss whether any installation requirement should apply differently based on the driver's age or driving history; and
4. outline necessary components of a regulatory framework that

would be needed to ensure devices were used accurately and properly.

§ 9 — OPERATOR’S RETRAINING PROGRAM AND RECKLESS DRIVING

Requires drivers to attend an operator’s retraining program upon their first conviction of reckless driving

The bill requires drivers to attend an operator’s retraining program upon their first conviction of reckless driving. Under current law, reckless driving is considered a “moving violation” for purposes of the operator’s retraining program. The motor vehicles commissioner may (and does, in practice) require drivers convicted of three moving or suspension violations (or two, for drivers under age 25) to attend the operator’s retraining program.

By law, the program completion date stays on a driver’s record until 36 months have passed without the driver committing any more moving or suspension violations. If the driver commits another moving or suspension violation during that period, the commissioner must suspend the person’s driver’s license or operating privilege for (1) 30 days upon a first conviction, (2) 60 days upon a second conviction, and (3) 90 days upon a third or subsequent violation.

§ 10 — CHEAPR ADAPTIVE E-BIKE INCENTIVES

Exempts adaptive e-bikes from the \$3,000 MSRP cap and adds residents with physical disabilities to the list of residents who must get priority for vouchers

This bill exempts adaptive e-bikes from the \$3,000 manufacturer’s suggested retail price (MSRP) cap for the CHEAPR e-bike voucher program, which applies by law until June 30, 2027. Under current law, an e-bike’s MSRP must be under the cap to be eligible for a voucher under the program; under the bill, adaptive e-bikes with MSRPs above that amount are eligible for a voucher if they are to be used by a resident with a disability.

By law, the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) administers the e-bike voucher program as part of CHEAPR. The law generally requires DEEP to set most of the program’s parameters administratively, including eligibility and voucher

amounts, but it (1) sets a minimum voucher amount at \$500 and (2) requires DEEP to give priority for vouchers to environmental justice community residents, those with incomes of no more than 300% of the poverty level, and those who participate in certain state and federal assistance programs. The bill adds residents with physical disabilities to the list of residents who must get priority for vouchers.

BACKGROUND

Federal Open Container Law Requirement

Federal law requires states to adopt an open container law that meets federal compliance criteria (23 U.S.C. § 154). To comply, the state law must apply to (1) possession and consumption, (2) the entire passenger area, (3) all alcoholic beverages, (4) all occupants, and (5) all motor vehicles. It must also provide for primary enforcement, meaning that law enforcement may issue a citation upon observing someone violating the law. It allows states to provide exceptions for (1) open containers stored in a locked container or, in vehicles without trunks, behind the last seat and (2) passengers in a for-hire transportation vehicle or an RV's living quarters (23 C.F.R. § 1270.4).

States without a compliant law must transfer 2.5% of their annual apportionment under specified highway construction programs (the National Highway Performance Program and the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program) to specified traffic safety programs (the 402 Highway Safety DUI Countermeasures Program or the Hazard Elimination Program) (23 C.F.R. § 1270.6).

Infractions

Infractions are punishable by fines, usually set by Superior Court judges, of between \$35 and \$90, plus a \$20 or \$35 surcharge and an additional fee based on the fine's amount. There may also be other applicable charges depending on the type of infraction. For example, certain motor vehicle infractions trigger a Special Transportation Fund surcharge of 50% of the fine. An infraction is not a crime and violators can generally pay the fine by mail without making a court appearance.

Vision Zero Council

PA 21-28, § 2, established the Vision Zero Council and charged it with developing a statewide policy and interagency approach to eliminating all transportation-related fatalities and severe injuries to pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, drivers, and passengers. It must consider ways to improve safety in all transportation modes using data, new partnerships, safe planning, and community-based solutions to achieve the goal of zero transportation-related fatalities.

By law, the council is composed of the DOT, Department of Public Health, and Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection commissioners and any other agency commissioners they invite. The council may establish committees to advise it in carrying out its duties.

Related Bills

sSB 6862, favorably reported by the Transportation Committee, modifies the definition of motor-driven cycle and helmet requirements pertaining to e-bikes.

sHB 7060, favorably reported by the Transportation Committee, makes violating the distracted driving law on a limited access highway a reckless driving violation.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Transportation Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 25 Nay 9 (03/19/2025)