

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2005 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 591 (Delegate Eckardt)
Environmental Matters

Motor Vehicles - Television-Type Receiving Equipment - Restrictions

This bill prohibits the use of television-type receiving equipment in the front seat or otherwise visible to a driver while the vehicle is being driven on a State highway. This prohibition does not apply to: (1) a vehicle used exclusively for safety or law enforcement purposes; (2) equipment for alphanumeric data and text transmission; or (3) a navigation system with picture display.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The change would not materially affect State finances. Enforcement could be handled with existing resources.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: Small businesses would be able to install DVD-type devices in places visible to the driver, increasing sales; however, this effect would be minimal.

Analysis

Current Law: A motor vehicle driven on a highway in Maryland may not be equipped with television-type receiving equipment in front of the back of the driver's seat or otherwise visible to the driver. This prohibition does not apply to: (1) a vehicle used exclusively for safety or law enforcement purposes; (2) equipment for alphanumeric data and text transmission; or (3) a navigation system with picture display.

Background: DVD players are becoming increasingly popular in vehicles. While most of these DVD players are intended to be viewed by passengers, in-dash models are becoming more common. Many of these players have built-in safety functions that prevent them from being used while the vehicle is in motion; however, these functions can be bypassed.

As of November 2004, at least 38 states, including Maryland, had laws prohibiting a television from appearing in view of a driver. However, this prohibition usually applies to devices that can receive a signal, making their applicability against DVD players questionable.

There has been at least one fatal accident in Alaska involving a driver watching a DVD through an in-dash monitor while driving. Other drivers have been cited for having videos visible to them while driving.

Maryland law currently prohibits a television-type device being in view of the driver. The bill would allow the device to exist but would prevent it from being operated in view of the driver while the vehicle is in motion.

According to the Chief Clerk of the District Court, there were 102 violations of the current prohibition in fiscal 2004. However, Legislative Services advises that most such tickets were likely written as part of a moving violation and would still be prohibited under the bill.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of Transportation, Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts), Department of State Police, Department of Legislative Services

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