

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2018 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE  
First Reader

House Bill 1384 (Delegate Miele)  
Environment and Transportation

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Motor Vehicles - School Vehicles - Flashing Advisory Signs

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This bill authorizes a school vehicle to be equipped with a flashing advisory sign on the rear, or both the front and rear of the school vehicle as specified, to warn drivers of other vehicles of the presence of the school vehicle when it is about to engage in activity that requires unusual care in approaching, overtaking, or passing the school vehicle. The bill specifies the standards and requirements for flashing advisory signs. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2018.**

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Fiscal Summary

**State Effect:** None.

**Local Effect:** Local school system expenditures increase to the extent they choose to purchase and install flashing advisory signs on school vehicles. Revenues are not affected.

**Small Business Effect:** Potential meaningful.

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Analysis

**Bill Summary:** Flashing advisory signs must be uniform statewide in design and operation and properly maintained and operated in accordance with the manufacturer's guidelines.

Regardless of the type of lighting used for illumination, each warning displayed by a flashing advisory sign must include a complete light quality arrangement to fully and clearly convey the intended warning to approaching drivers. **Exhibit 1** shows the warning message that must be displayed on activation of the various safety warning lights by the school vehicle driver.

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**Exhibit 1**  
**Required Advisory Sign Display Warnings by Safety Light Activation**

**On Activation of the:**

**A Display Warning Message Must:**

**Amber alternately flashing safety lights**

Alternately flash the words “caution” and “stopping” in amber letters.

**Red alternately flashing safety lights**

Alternately flash the words “stop” and “do not pass” in red letters.

**Hazard lights**

Alternately flash the words “caution” and “stopping” in amber letters.

**Back-up lights**

Flash the word “caution” in amber letters.

Source: Department of Legislative Services

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*Rear-facing Flashing Advisory Sign*

A flashing advisory sign on the rear of a school vehicle must:

- be mounted on the rear of the school vehicle in an area that does not interfere with existing equipment requirements;
- be sealed and weathertight;
- be 23.5 by 8.75 by 1.5 inches in size;
- be connected to and controlled by the vehicle’s alternately flashing safety lights, the hazard lights, and the back-up lights;
- display a specified warning in either amber or red letters, depending on which lights are activated;
- display letters that are at least 1.5 inches tall;
- have a minimum viewing angle of 15 degrees on each side of the perpendicular axis of the vehicle; and
- be clearly visible in direct sunlight from a distance of 500 feet along the axis of the school vehicle.

### *Front-facing Flashing Advisory Sign*

A front-facing flashing advisory sign may only be placed on a school vehicle if a rear-facing advisory flashing advisory sign has been placed on the rear of the school vehicle. The front-facing advisory sign must:

- be connected to and controlled by only the amber and red alternately flashing safety lights;
- display the same message as the rear-facing flashing advisory sign when the amber or red alternately flashing lights are activated; and
- be mounted below the windshield, vertically centered, and not create a vision obstruction for the driver of the school vehicle.

**Current Law:** A “school vehicle” is generally defined as any motor vehicle used regularly for the exclusive transportation of children, students, or teachers for educational purposes or in connection with a school activity. A “school bus” is defined as a type of school vehicle that meets specified weight, construction, and seating space requirements.

### *Required School Vehicle Lighting Equipment*

A school vehicle registered in the State must be equipped with an eight-light system of alternately flashing lights that meet the standards contained in the Society of Automotive Engineers Standard J887 (May 1982) and must consist of two amber lights and two red lights at the rear of the vehicle and two amber lights and two red lights at the front of the vehicle. The school vehicle may be equipped with a white flashing light installed on the roof of the vehicle. School vehicles must be marked and identified as specified, and school vehicle lighting equipment and special warning devices must conform to Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) regulations.

MVA regulations also authorize the use of (1) a stop signal arm on the front driver side of a school vehicle; (2) a crossing arm on the far right of the front bumper; and (3) a flashing white strobe light on the roof of the vehicle, as specified.

### *Alternately Flashing Light Operation*

A person may not operate any alternately flashing light on any school vehicle except when the school vehicle is stopping or stopped on a roadway for the purpose of receiving or discharging passengers unless the school vehicle is approaching from the rear or the front, within 100 feet of another school vehicle in the act of loading or unloading passengers on the same roadway.

Whenever the vehicle is not being operated on a highway for the transportation of children, students, or teachers for educational purposes or in connection with a school activity, the alternately flashing lights must be deactivated and the words “school bus” at the front and rear of the vehicle must be covered or otherwise concealed.

### *Duty to Stop, Generally*

If a school vehicle stops on a roadway and is operating alternately flashing red lights, the driver of any other vehicle meeting or overtaking the school vehicle must stop at least 20 feet from the rear of the school vehicle, if approaching from its rear, or at least 20 feet from the front of the school vehicle, if approaching the school vehicle from its front. The driver of any vehicle meeting or overtaking the school bus may not proceed until the school vehicle resumes motion or the alternately flashing red lights are deactivated. The requirement does not apply to the driver of a vehicle on a divided highway, if the school vehicle is on a different roadway.

A person convicted of a violation of these provisions is subject to a maximum fine of \$1,000. The prepayment fine is \$570, and three points must be assessed against the license. If an individual fails to remain stopped for a school vehicle with alternately flashing red lights and contributes to an accident, the prepayment fine is \$610 and three points must be assessed.

### *School Bus Camera Monitoring Systems*

A driver is also subject to a civil penalty if the driver violates the law relating to passing and overtaking a school bus with alternately flashing red signals activated. If the driver does not receive a citation by a police officer at the time of the violation, a \$500 civil penalty applies if the driver is recorded by a school bus monitoring camera during the commission of a violation.

**Background:** The District Court advises that, in fiscal 2017, 881 citations were issued by law enforcement officers for violations of the general prohibition on overtaking and a passing school vehicle that is operating alternately flashing red lights. Montgomery County reports that during the 2016-2017 school year, school bus cameras generated 19,566 citations, with an additional 525 violations recorded during summer school.

**Small Business Effect:** Sales increase for businesses that sell and/or install after-market warning signs to the extent local school systems choose to install flashing advisory signs on school vehicles.

## **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Montgomery County; Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); Maryland State Department of Education; Department of State Police; Maryland Department of Transportation; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - March 7, 2018  
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