

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2019 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 789 (Delegates Hartman and Otto)
Environment and Transportation

Vehicle Laws - Special Event Zones in Worcester County - Penalties

This emergency bill subjects specified violations of the Maryland Vehicle Law to higher maximum fines when such violations occur in “special event zones” within Worcester County. Specifically, a person is subject to a fine of up to \$1,000 if convicted of (1) negligent driving; (2) driving a motor vehicle in (or participating as a timekeeper or flagman in) a race or speed contest; or (3) skidding, spinning of wheels, or causing excessive noise within a special event zone.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund revenues may increase minimally due to higher maximum fines in the affected areas. Enforcement can be handled with existing resources.

Local Effect: Finances in Worcester County and municipalities within the county are not materially affected. Enforcement can be handled with existing resources.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law:

Special Event Zones

A “special event” is any automotive or motor vehicle event occurring on (or in close proximity to) a highway that (1) has been permitted or approved by a unit of local government or (2) is expected to have 1,000 or more individuals in attendance, regardless

of whether the event has been permitted or approved by a unit of local government. A “special event zone” is an area on (or alongside) a highway that is appropriately marked by warning signs or traffic control devices.

Chapter 325 of 2018 authorizes the State Highway Administration (SHA), on its own initiative or at the request of a local authority, to designate an area on a State highway in Worcester County as a special event zone. Likewise, a local authority in Worcester County may designate an area on a highway under its jurisdiction as a special event zone. In either case, SHA or the local authority may reduce speed limits in the affected location after a determination that the change is necessary for public safety. Chapter 325 also establishes a new prohibition on speeding within such zones, which is punishable by a fine of up to \$1,000. The lower speed limit for a special event zone takes effect when posted.

Negligent Driving

A person is guilty of negligent driving if the motor vehicle is driven in a careless or imprudent manner that endangers any property or the life or safety of any individual. A violation is a misdemeanor, subject to a maximum fine of \$500. Upon conviction, the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) must assess one point against the driver’s license, or three points if the offense contributes to an accident. The District Court assesses a prepayment penalty of \$140 for this offense or \$280 if the offense contributes to an accident.

Racing, Skidding, Wheel Spinning, and Excessive Noise

On any highway or private property used by the general public, a person may not drive a vehicle in a race or speed contest (or participate as a timekeeper or flagman in those events). A violation is a misdemeanor, subject to a maximum fine of \$500. Upon conviction, MVA must assess five points against the driver’s license. The District Court assesses a prepayment penalty of \$290 for these offenses. In addition, if the violation results in serious bodily injury to another person, the person must appear in court, is subject to imprisonment for up to one year, a fine of up to \$1,000, or both.

In addition, a person may not drive a motor vehicle in any improper manner intended to cause skidding, spinning of wheels, or excessive noise. These violations are a misdemeanor, subject to a maximum fine of \$500. Upon conviction, MVA must assess one point against the driver’s license or three points if the offense contributes to an accident. The District Court assesses a prepayment penalty of \$70 for these offenses or \$110 if the offenses contribute to an accident.

Background: In calendar 2018, the District Court reports that there were 167 violations and 19 guilty dispositions for speeding within a special event zone.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: SB 682 (Senator Carozza) - Judicial Proceedings.

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

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md/kdm

Analysis by: Eric F. Pierce

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510