

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 1375 (Delegate Stein)
Environment and Transportation

Vehicle Equipment - Portable Variable Messaging Signs - Authorization

This bill authorizes a tow truck to display a portable variable message sign mounted on the truck while at the scene of an accident or a disabled vehicle. The portable variable messaging sign must conform to the standards established in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices adopted by the State Highway Administration (SHA) and display only those messages approved for use by SHA.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Because the bill is *authorizing* in nature, it does not directly affect State expenditures. However, to the extent applicable agencies *choose* to purchase and deploy tow trucks with portable variable messaging signs, State expenditures increase, as discussed below. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: Local expenditures are not directly affected. While not required under the bill, local expenditures increase if local government agencies *choose* to purchase tow trucks with portable variable messaging signs. Revenues are not affected.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: In general, a person may not drive or move on any highway any vehicle or equipment that is equipped with or displays any light or signal device designed to emit an oscillating, rotating, blinking, or other type of emission of light, except as authorized or required under the Maryland Vehicle Law. A violation is a misdemeanor subject to a maximum fine of \$500. The prepayment penalty assessed by the District Court is \$60.

Service vehicles, waste or recycling collection vehicles, rural letter carrier vehicles, slow-moving farm vehicles, and tow trucks are authorized to be equipped with or display yellow or amber lights or signal devices. Under specified circumstances, highway maintenance and service equipment, or vehicles owned by the State or a local jurisdiction, may simultaneously be equipped with and display green flashing lights. These lights or signal devices may be flashed or oscillated or otherwise used only in the course of official duties to indicate to the public that the vehicle is slow moving or otherwise is impeding traffic.

One or more amber flashing lights may be displayed by a tow truck while at the scene of an accident or a disabled vehicle or while towing a vehicle and by snow removal and other highway maintenance and service equipment and escort vehicles.

State Expenditures: The bill is authorizing in nature and does not require State agencies to purchase and operate tow trucks with mounted variable messaging signs. Thus, the bill does not directly affect State finances. However, State expenditures increase *if* a State agency *chooses* to purchase and deploy such vehicles. *For illustrative purposes only*, the Maryland Transportation Authority advises that the costs associated with purchasing a sufficient fleet of tow trucks is \$3.0 million (20 trucks at \$150,000 per truck).

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of State Police; Maryland Department of Transportation; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 27, 2025
km/aad

Analysis by: Ralph W. Kettell

Direct Inquiries to:

(410) 946-5510

(301) 970-5510