SENATE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Senator Jesse Arreguín, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No:	AB 1913	**Hearing Date:**	June 30, 2026
Author:	Soria		
Version:	May 7, 2026		
Urgency:	No	**Fiscal:**	Yes
Consultant:	AB		

Subject: ***Licensure: emergency equipment***

HISTORY

Source: California State Sheriffs Association

Prior Legislation: SB 128 (Committee on Budget), Ch. 16, Stats. of 2025
SB 349 (Archuleta), held in Senate Appropriations, 2025
SB 1021 (Archuleta), held in Senate Appropriations, 2023
SB 287 (Grove), Ch. 610, Stats. of 2021
SB 587 (Atkins), Ch. 286, Stats. of 2017
AB 2438 (Lowenthal), Ch. 97, Stats. of 2014
AB 82 (Jeffries), Ch. 92, Stats. of 2011
AB 1648 (Jeffries), Ch. 360, Stats. of 2010

Support: California Police Chiefs Association

Opposition: None known

Assembly Floor Vote: 77 - 0

PURPOSE

The purpose of this bill is to authorize an employee of or volunteer with a law enforcement agency to operate emergency equipment provided they have completed a required training.

Existing law defines an authorized emergency vehicle to mean any publicly owned vehicle operated by any federal, state, or local agency, department, or district employing peace officers as defined, for use by those officers in the performance of their duties (Veh. Code, § 165, subd. (b)(1).)

Existing law provides that a public employee is not liable for civil damages on account of personal injury to or death of any person or damage to property resulting from the operation, in the line of duty, of an authorized emergency vehicle while responding to an emergency call or when in the immediate pursuit of an actual or suspected violator of the law, or when responding to but not upon returning from a fire alarm or other emergency call. (Veh. Code, § 17004.)

Existing law provides that States that the driver of an authorized emergency vehicle is exempt from various Vehicle Code requirements under the following conditions:

- If the vehicle is being driven in response to an emergency call or while engaged in rescue operations or is being used in the immediate pursuit of an actual or suspected violator of the law or is responding to, but not returning from, a fire alarm, except that fire department vehicles are exempt whether directly responding to an emergency call or operated from one place to another as rendered desirable or necessary by reason of an emergency call and operated to the scene of the emergency or operated from one fire station to another or to some other location by reason of the emergency call.
- If the driver of the vehicle sounds a siren as may be reasonably necessary and the vehicle displays a lighted red lamp visible from the front as a warning to other drivers and pedestrians. (Veh. Code, § 21055.)

Existing law requires that every authorized emergency vehicle to be equipped with at least one steady burning red warning lamp visible from at least 1,000 feet to the front of the vehicle, as specified, and provides that emergency vehicles may display revolving, flashing, or steady red warning lights to the front, sides or rear of the vehicles. (Veh. Code, § 25252.)

Existing law authorizes an authorized emergency vehicle, where the vehicle is being driven in response to an emergency call, as specified, and the driver sounds a siren and displays a lighted red lamp, to display a flashing white light from a gaseous discharge lamp designed and used for the purpose of controlling official traffic control signals. (Veh. Code, § 25258, subd. (a).)

Existing law authorizes an authorized emergency vehicle used by a specified peace officer or probation officer, in the performance of the peace officer's duties, to additionally display a steady or flashing blue warning light visible from the front, sides, or rear of the vehicle. (Veh. Code, § 25258, subd. (b)(1).)

Existing law requires a probation officer, before they operate an emergency vehicle with a blue warning light, to complete a four-hour classroom training course regarding the operation of emergency vehicles that is certified by the Standards and Training for Corrections Division of the Board of State and Community Corrections, however, this does not expand any existing authority of a probation officer to conduct a high-speed vehicle pursuit or change any existing training requirements for high-speed vehicle pursuits.. (Veh. Code, § 25258, subd. (b)(2)-(3).)

Existing law provides that to operate firefighting equipment, a driver, including a till operator, must either obtain and maintain a class A or B license, as specified, or obtain and maintain a firefighter endorsement issued by the DMV and obtain and maintain a class C license, a restricted class A license, as specified, or a noncommercial class B license, as specified. (Veh. Code, § 12804.11, subd. (a).)

Existing law provides that to qualify for a firefighter endorsement, the driver shall do all of the following:

- Provide to the department proof of current employment as a firefighter or registration as a volunteer firefighter with a fire department and evidence of fire equipment operation training by providing a letter or other indication from the chief of the fire department or his or her designee.
- Pass the written firefighter examination developed by the department with the cooperation of the Office of the State Fire Marshal.

- Upon application and every two years thereafter, submit medical information on a form approved by the department. (Veh. Code, § 12804.11, subd. (b).)

Existing law requires an applicant for a driver's license to submit to an examination appropriate to the type of motor vehicle or combination of vehicles the application desires a license to drive. (Veh. Code, § 12804.9, subd. (b).)

Existing law provides that a class A vehicle includes the following: a combination of vehicles if a vehicle being towed has a gross vehicle weight rating of more than 10,000 pounds, a vehicle towing more than one vehicle, a trailer bus, and the operation of all vehicles under class B and class C. (Veh. Code, § 12804.9, subd. (b)(1).)

Existing law provides that a class B vehicle includes the following: a single vehicle with a gross vehicle weight rating of more than 26,000 pounds, single vehicle with three or more axles, as specified, a bus with a gross vehicle weight rating of more than 26,000 pounds, except a trailer bus, a farm labor vehicle, a single vehicle with three or more axles or a gross vehicle weight rating of more than 26,000 pounds towing another vehicle with a gross vehicle weight rating of 10,000 pounds or less, a house car over 40 feet in length, and the operation of all vehicles covered under class C. (Veh. Code, § 12804.9, subd. (b)(2).)

Existing law provides that a class C vehicle includes the following: a two-axle vehicle with a gross vehicle weight rating of 26,000 pounds or less, as specified, a two-axle vehicle weighing 4,000 pounds or more unladen when towing a trailer coach not exceeding 9,000 pounds, a house car of 40 feet in length or less, a three-axle vehicle weighing 6,000 pounds gross or less, a house car of 40 feet in length or less or a vehicle towing another vehicle with a gross vehicle weight rating of 10,000 pounds or less, a two-axle vehicle weighing 4,000 pounds or more unladen when towing either a trailer coach or a fifth-wheel travel trailer not exceeding 10,000 pounds gross vehicle weight rating, as specified, a two-axle vehicle weighing 4,000 pounds or more unladen when towing a fifth-wheel travel trailer exceeding 10,000 pounds, but not exceeding 15,000 pounds, as specified, a vehicle or combination of vehicles with a gross combination weight rating of 26,000 pounds or less, as specified, firefighting equipment, provided that the equipment is operated by a person who holds a firefighter endorsement, as specified; a motorized scooter, a bus with a gross vehicle weight rating of 26,000 pounds or less, except a trailer bus. (Veh. Code, § 12804.9, subd. (b)(3).)

This bill provides that an employee of, or a volunteer registered with, a law enforcement agency, as defined, shall be permitted to operate emergency equipment pursuant to the provisions below.

This bill provides that in order to operate emergency equipment, an employee or volunteer must complete a training that includes all of the following:

- A classroom portion of at least 16 hours taught by an instructor who meets or exceeds the standards adopted by the law enforcement agency described in subdivision (a) for the operation of emergency equipment.
- A driver training portion of at least 14 hours that includes directly-supervised behind-the-wheel training by an instructor approved by the law enforcement agency employer and who possesses a minimum of five years of experience as an emergency vehicle operator.
- A written emergency equipment operation examination.

This bill requires instructors for the training program to meet both of the following requirements:

- Possess a valid California class A or class B license, or, alternatively, a class C license, having completed the emergency equipment operation training and possessing at least five years of experience operating emergency equipment.
- Be certified as a qualified training instructor or training officer by the State of California, the federal government, or a county training officers' association.

This bill requires a training program participant to possess a valid California class C license.

This bill defines "emergency equipment" as a motor vehicle or combination of vehicles that meets the definition of a class A or class B vehicle, as specified, subject to the following limitations:

- The motor vehicle shall not exceed 45 feet in length and the towed vehicle, if applicable, shall not exceed 30,000 pounds gross vehicle weight or gross vehicle weight rating, whichever is greater.
- The motor vehicle or combination of vehicles shall be used to travel to and from the scene of an emergency situation, to and from a place where the emergency equipment is repaired or repositioned, or to transport equipment used in the control of an emergency situation and that is owned, leased, rented by, or under the exclusive control of a law enforcement agency.

This bill provides that an authorized emergency vehicle that has been issued a license by the Commissioner of the California Highway Patrol to operate in response to emergency calls is not "emergency equipment."

This bill provides that vehicles operated pursuant to the above provisions are not exempt from specified size, weight and load requirements.

This bill expands the definition of a class C motor vehicle to include emergency equipment, provided the equipment is operated by a person who has completed the emergency equipment training specified above.

COMMENTS

1. Need for This Bill

According to the author:

> While effective law enforcement and public safety protection often requires the use of specialized vehicles, many law enforcement staff and volunteers do not possess a class A or B driver license that would normally be required to operate this equipment. AB 1913 will allow law enforcement staff and volunteers to operate specified emergency equipment with a class C driver license having completed a rigorous course of training. This bill will protect public safety by allowing more qualified individuals to operate certain equipment without a specific type of commercial driver license without sacrificing training and education on the part of the operators.

2. Authorization to Drive Emergency Vehicles and Effect of This Bill

California law enforcement agencies often rely on oversized, specialty emergency equipment – including mobile command centers, incident response trailers, and tactical rescue vehicles - to coordinate disaster relief, manage active threat situations, and establish field communications. Although the vast majority of Californians possess a class C (standard) driver's license, most of this specialty emergency equipment meets certain size and tonnage specifications that allow them only to be driven by individuals with class A and B commercial licenses.[1] According to the author, these strict licensing requirements reduce the pool of individuals capable of operating emergency equipment, which is exacerbated by the difficulty law enforcement agencies face in recruiting sworn and non-sworn personnel (including volunteers) that have the appropriate commercial license.

This bill is largely modeled after existing law allowing firefighters and volunteer firefighters to operate large firefighting equipment that would normally require a class A or B license with only a class C license by obtaining a "firefighter endorsement." Generally, "firefighting equipment" is defined as a motor vehicle that meets the definition of a class A or class B vehicle that is used to travel to and from the scene of an emergency situation, or to transport equipment used in the control of an emergency situation, and that is owned, leased, or rented by, or under the exclusive control of a federal, state or local fire department.[2] To operate such vehicles, firefighters with a class C license (who do not have a class A or B license) must obtain a firefighter endorsement from the DMV, the requirements for which include proof of employment as a firefighter, evidence of completing fire equipment operation training, as specified, and pass the written firefighter examination developed by the DMV in coordination with the State Fire Marshal.[3] The mandated training must include at least 16 hours of classroom instruction and at least 14 hours of directly supervised behind-the-wheel driver training.[4]

This bill authorizes an employee of or volunteer registered with a law enforcement agency who has a class C license to operate emergency equipment upon completion of a training similar to that prescribed for the firefighter endorsement. Specifically, the training under this bill requires at least 16 hours of classroom instruction by an instructor that meets specific requirements and a driver training portion of at least 14 hours of behind-the-wheel training, as well as passage of a written exam. For the purposes of the bill, "emergency equipment" is defined as a motor vehicle that 1) does not exceed 45 feet in length, and any towed vehicle, if applicable, does not exceed 30,000 pounds gross weight, and 2) must be used to travel to and from the scene of an emergency situation, to and from a place where the emergency equipment is repaired or repositioned, or to transport equipment used in the control of an emergency situation and that is owned, leased, rented by, or under the exclusive control of a law enforcement agency. Finally, this bill also expands the definition of a class C motor vehicle to include emergency equipment, as defined above, provided the equipment is operated by a person who has completed the requisite training.

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[1] A commercial driver's license (CDL) is required for operating heavy vehicles (over 26,000 lbs.), passenger buses, or vehicles transporting hazardous materials. A class A CDL is required for combinations of vehicles (e.g., tractor-trailers) with a GVWR over 26,000 lbs., where the towed vehicle is over 10,000 lbs. A class B CDL is required for a single vehicle with a GVWR over 26,000 lbs. (e.g., box trucks, city buses, dump trucks). (Veh. Code, § 12804.9, subd. (b).)

[2] Veh. Code, § 12804.11, subd. (f).

[3] Veh. Code, § 12804.11, subd. (b).

[4] Veh. Code, § 12804.11, subd. (b)(1)(B).

3. Double Referral

This bill was heard in the Senate Transportation Committee on June 23rd, after this analysis was finalized. For a discussion of other issues not covered in this analysis, see the analysis prepared by that committee.

4. Argument in Support

According to the bill's sponsor, the California State Sheriffs Association:

> We are pleased to sponsor Assembly Bill 1913, which would allow law enforcement employees and volunteers to operate specified emergency equipment with a class C driver license after having completed additional and specified classroom and behind-the-wheel training.
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> In many counties, deputy sheriffs and sheriff's office volunteers are often among the first to be called to emergency scenes, including wildfires, search and rescues, vehicle accidents, and natural disasters. Special equipment is normally needed to mitigate the effects of these emergency incidents and save lives. These employees and volunteers may be asked to operate specialty equipment including mobile command posts and vehicles that transport other equipment on heavy trailers. Much of this equipment ordinarily requires an operator to possess a class A or B driver license, which reduces the pool of people available to operate this equipment and subsequently respond. Sheriffs' offices struggle with recruiting sworn and non-sworn personnel (volunteers), especially those with class A or B driver licenses.
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> AB 1913 creates a common-sense solution to this problem. The bill allows employees or volunteers who have a class C license and complete classroom education and behind-the-wheel training provided by trained instructors to operate certain types of equipment in specified situations without having to obtain a class A or B license. This approach also carries the benefit of ensuring operators are trained and experienced without creating expensive new licensing or certification burdens on state agencies.

-- END --