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# SENATE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Senator Aisha Wahab, Chair

2023 - 2024 Regular

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**Bill No:** SB 1021                      **Hearing Date:** April 23, 2024  
**Author:** Archuleta  
**Version:** February 6, 2024  
**Urgency:** No                                      **Fiscal:** Yes  
**Consultant:** JD

**Subject:** *Emergency vehicles: blue warning lights*

## HISTORY

Source: Author

Prior Legislation: SB 587 (Atkins), Ch. 286, Stats. 2017

Support: California Correctional Peace Officers Association (CCPOA)

Opposition: None known

## PURPOSE

*The purpose of this bill is to authorize parole officers to equip their emergency vehicles with blue warning lights upon completion of a certified 4-hour classroom training course regarding the operation of emergency vehicles.*

*Existing law* defines an “authorized emergency vehicle” to include “[a]ny vehicle owned or operated by any department or agency of the United States government when the vehicle is used in responding to emergency fire, ambulance, or lifesaving calls or is actively engaged in law enforcement work.” (Vehicle Code § 165.)

*Existing law* states that the driver of an authorized emergency vehicle is exempt from a variety of vehicle code requirements, under all of 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. (Vehicle Code § 21055.)

*Existing law* provides that Section 21055 does not relieve the driver of a vehicle from the duty to drive with due regard for the safety of all persons using the highway, nor protect him from the consequences of an arbitrary exercise of the privileges granted in that section. (Vehicle Code § 21056.)

*Existing law* requires that every authorized emergency vehicle be equipped with at least one steady burning red warning lamp visible from at least 1,000 feet to the front of the vehicle to be used as provided in this code. In addition, authorized emergency vehicles may display revolving, flashing, or steady red warning lights to the front, sides or rear of the vehicles. (Vehicle Code § 25252.)

*Existing law* provides that every authorized emergency vehicle may be equipped with a system which flashes the upper-beam headlamps of the vehicle with the flashes occurring alternately from the front headlamp on one side of the vehicle to the front headlamp on the other side of the vehicle. The flashing of the headlamps must consist only of upper-beam flashing, and not the flashing of any other light beam. This system can only be used when an authorized emergency vehicle is being operated pursuant to Section 21055. (Vehicle Code 25252.5.)

*Existing law* allows an authorized emergency vehicle operating under the conditions specified in Section 21055 to display a flashing white light from a gaseous discharge lamp designed and used for the purpose of controlling official traffic control signals. (Vehicle Code § 25258(a).)

*Existing law* allows authorized emergency vehicle used by a peace officer, as defined, in the performance of the peace officer's duties, to, in addition, display a steady or flashing blue warning light visible from the front, sides, or rear of the vehicle. (Vehicle Code § 25258(b).)

*Existing law* allows any authorized emergency vehicle to display flashing amber warning lights to the front, sides, or rear. A vehicle operated by a police or traffic officer while in the actual performance of his or her duties may display steady burning or flashing white lights to either side mounted above the roofline of the vehicle. Any authorized emergency vehicle may display not more than two flashing white warning lights to the front mounted above the roofline of the vehicle and not more than two flashing white warning lights to the front mounted below the roofline of the vehicle. (Vehicle Code § 25259.)

*Existing law* requires POST to implement a course or courses of instruction for the regular and periodic training of law enforcement officers in the handling of high-speed vehicle pursuits and shall also develop uniform, minimum guidelines for adoption and promulgation by California law enforcement agencies for response to high-speed vehicle pursuits. The guidelines and course of instruction are required to stress the importance of vehicle safety and protecting the public at all times, include a regular assessment of law enforcement's vehicle pursuit policies, practices, and training, and recognize the need to balance the known offense and the need for immediate capture against the risks to officers and other citizens of a high-speed pursuit. These guidelines must also be a resource for each agency executive to use in the creation of a specific pursuit policy that the agency is encouraged to adopt and promulgate, and that reflects the needs of the agency, the jurisdiction it serves, and the law. (Penal Code § 13519.8.)

*Existing law* defines the duties of a parole officer that extend their authority to any place in the state, this authority extends:

- To conditions of parole, probation, mandatory supervision, or postrelease community supervision by any person in this state on parole, probation, mandatory supervision, or postrelease community supervision;
- To the escape of any inmate or ward from a state or local institution;
- To the transportation of persons on parole, probation, mandatory supervision, or postrelease community supervision;
- To violations of any penal provisions of law which are discovered while performing the usual or authorized duties of the officer's employment;
- To the rendering of mutual aid to any other law enforcement agency. (Penal Code § 830.5)

*This bill* would allow parole officers to display a steady or flashing blue warning light visible from the front, sides, or rear of the vehicle while in performance of their duties after completion of 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.

*This bill* does not expand any existing authority of a parole officer to conduct a high-speed vehicle pursuit.

## COMMENTS

### 1. Need for This Bill

According to the Author:

Without blue warning lights, other law enforcement and first responders are less likely to recognize, assist and support parole officers in the performance of their duties. Over time, California has expanded the types of officers that are able to display these emergency blue lights. In 2018, the Legislature passed into law SB 587 (Atkins), extending blue lights to Probation vehicles so long as the officer completes a 4-hour classroom training course. The Legislature correctly recognized the risk to the public and California's law enforcement officers that confusion over emergency lights created. SB 1081 simply authorizes Parole Officers to display these lights as well. This is especially important in cases where an officer is transporting someone who is suffering a medical emergency. When this happens, every second counts. Parole officers may also be called upon for assistance by other law enforcement during emergencies but cannot display blue warning lights to alert other officers on scene, creating unnecessary confusion.

## 2. POST Training

As stated above, this legislation authorizes parole officers to display a blue warning light on their authorized emergency vehicles if the officer completes an emergency vehicle operations course certified by POST.

POST currently provides vehicle operations training as part of the Regular Basic Course. This course teaches officers to, among other things:

- Determine a safe distance when following another vehicle
- Identify the effect of speed on a driver's peripheral vision
- Discuss how perception and reaction time affects a vehicle's total stopping distance
- Demonstrate appropriate actions to prevent intersection collisions
- Recognize potential hazards of freeway driving and appropriate actions to prevent collisions
- Demonstrate appropriate actions to prevent collisions when operating a vehicle in reverse
- Demonstrate the importance and proper use of safety belts in a law enforcement vehicle
- Identify psychological and physiological factors that may have an effect on a peace officer's driving
- Identify hazards of various road conditions
- Discuss the components of a vehicle inspection
- Demonstrate proper techniques for recognizing and coping with distractions while operating a law enforcement vehicle
- Identify the objectives of emergency response driving
- Explain the importance of agency-specific policies and guidelines regarding emergency response driving
- Identify the statutory responsibilities of non-law enforcement vehicle drivers when driving in the presence of emergency vehicles operated under emergency response conditions
- Demonstrate the use of emergency warning devices available on law enforcement vehicles
- Identify factors that can limit the effectiveness of a vehicle's emergency warning devices
- Demonstrate the use of communication equipment
- Identify the effects of siren syndrome
- Recognize guidelines for entering an intersection when driving under emergency response conditions

(Learning Domain 19; <https://post.ca.gov/regular-basic-course-training-specifications.aspx>.)

## 3. Argument in Support

According to the CCPOA:

[...] SB 1021 would authorize parole officers to display the blue warning light from their emergency vehicles if they complete a 4-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. This bill does not expand any existing authority of a parole officer to conduct a high-speed vehicle

pursuit, nor does it change any existing training requirements for high-speed vehicle pursuits.

Without blue warning lights, other law enforcement and first responders are less likely to recognize, assist and support parole officers in the performance of their duties. This is especially important in cases where an officer is transporting someone suffering a medical emergency. When this happens, every second counts.

Parole officers may also be called upon for assistance by other law enforcement during emergencies but cannot display blue warning lights to alert other officers on scene. This creates unnecessary confusion for the public and officers. In some situations, parole officers may also be called upon to make emergency arrests and can be the first LEO to respond to a crime scene.

**-- END --**