

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6219

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Law & Justice, January 14, 2016

Title: An act relating to sentencing for vehicular homicide.

Brief Description: Concerning vehicular homicide sentencing.

Sponsors: Senators Brown, Angel, Padden, Hewitt, O'Ban, Roach and Pearson.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Law & Justice: 1/14/16 [DP-WM].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON LAW & JUSTICE

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Padden, Chair; O'Ban, Vice Chair; Pedersen, Ranking Minority Member; Darneille, Frockt, Pearson and Roach.

Staff: Tim Ford (786-7423)

Background: Certain felonious crimes are ranked according to their level of seriousness. The highest ranked felony is aggravated murder 1 with a seriousness level of XVI. The lowest ranked felonies include crimes like attempting to elude a pursuing police vehicle, which has a seriousness level of I. All ranked felonies are codified in law and are utilized, in conjunction with an offender score, to determine the standard sentence range for crimes.

A driver is guilty of vehicular homicide when an injury proximately caused by operating a vehicle results in the death of a person within three years of the incident. Vehicular homicide may be committed and charged in the three ways depicted in the following chart.

Vehicular Homicide.

Committed while Driving	Rank of Seriousness Level	Standard Sentence Range*
Under the influence of intoxicating liquor or drug	Level XI	78 -102 months
In a reckless manner	Level VIII	21 - 27 months

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

With disregard for the safety of others	Level VII	15 - 20 months
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*This chart assumes the offender score is zero. If the offender score is greater than zero, then the standard sentence range increases.

A person is classified as driving "in a reckless manner" when that person knows of and disregards a substantial risk that a wrongful act may occur, and that disregard is a gross deviation from the conduct of a reasonable person in the same situation.

As a consequence of the different rankings, the standard sentence range will be different depending on how the crime is committed and charged.

Summary of Bill: Vehicular homicide while driving in a reckless manner is ranked at seriousness level of XI rather than level VIII. This is similar to the current ranking for vehicular homicide while driving under the influence of intoxicating liquor or any drug.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 8, 2016.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: You never expect to bury a child. The criminal was sentenced to only 8.5 years in prison, the maximum allowable for vehicular homicide while driving recklessly, and he may be released after serving only 3.5 years. It was egregious, and the criminal was excessively speeding through a residential area. The law should be changed so no one else has to go through this again. A person charged with manslaughter would get a greater sentence in prison and it also has the same element of recklessness. The law should be reconciled so that when a person kills another due to recklessness, the criminal sentence is the same regardless of whether the crime is manslaughter or vehicular homicide.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Sharon Brown, prime sponsor; Shawn Sant, Franklin County Prosecutor; John and Matthew Smith.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.