

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## HB 2033

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As of February 17, 2022

**Title:** An act relating to safety measures for fire department vehicles and other vehicles using lights or other signals in emergency or work zones.

**Brief Description:** Concerning safety measures for fire department vehicles and other vehicles using lights or other signals in emergency or work zones.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Donaghy, Bronoske, Shewmake, Sutherland, Harris-Talley and Riccelli.

**Brief History:** Passed House: 2/9/22, 85-8.

**Committee Activity:** Transportation: 2/17/22.

### Brief Summary of Bill

- Allows firetrucks to operate rear-facing blue lights.
- Requires drivers to reduce speed on high-speed highways to 50 miles per hour or less if unable to move over when approaching an emergency or work zone.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

**Staff:** Kelly Simpson (786-7403)

**Background:** Under current law, firetrucks must be identified by red lights of an intermittent flashing type, visible from both front and rear for a distance of 500 feet under normal atmospheric conditions. The red flashing lights must be in operation at all times when the vehicle is on emergency status.

An emergency or work zone is defined as the adjacent lanes of the roadway 200 feet before and after:

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- a stationary authorized emergency vehicle using audible or visual signals, or both;
- a tow truck using visual red lights;
- other vehicles providing roadside assistance using warning lights with 360 degree visibility;
- a police vehicle properly and lawfully displaying a flashing, blinking, or alternating emergency light or lights; or
- a stationary or slow moving highway construction vehicle, highway maintenance vehicle, solid waste vehicle, or utility service vehicle using flashing lights or warning lights with 360 degree visibility.

Drivers approaching an emergency or work zone must proceed with caution and, if the opportunity exists, with due regard for safety and traffic conditions, yield the right-of-way by making a lane change or moving away from the lane or shoulder occupied by an emergency or work zone vehicle. If approaching the emergency or work zone on a highway having less than four lanes, the driver must also reduce the speed of the vehicle. If changing lanes or moving away would be unsafe, the driver must proceed with due caution and reduce the speed of the vehicle to at least 10 miles per hour below the posted speed limit.

**Summary of Bill:** Firetrucks may operate rear-facing blue lights. The combination of red and blue lights may only be used at the scene of an emergency.

Drivers must reduce their speed to 50 miles per hour or less, on a highway with a speed limit of 60 miles per hour or more, if unable to move over when approaching an emergency or work zone.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** No.

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: Red flashing lights have become blurred to drivers as they approach emergency vehicles. The blue lights would help drivers distinguish and recognize that a firetruck/first responder is ahead and that they are approaching an emergency/work zone. This bill helps as a solution to danger firetruck stops along highways. The flashing red lights are not enough to get traffic to slow down. Firetruck operators want the same response that law enforcement vehicles get with their blue lights. This bill would reduce risks to first responders. People slow down when they see blue lights. This bill will not diminish drivers' responses to law enforcement vehicles.

CON: Data shows much higher roadside collisions with law enforcement vehicles. The

blue lights don't really make a difference. Roadside collisions of emergency vehicles are the result of inattentive drivers. Blue lights indicates a law enforcement incident. Documentation should be required around the use of blue lights on firetrucks and the number of collisions.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Representative Brandy Donaghy, Prime Sponsor; Alex Hansen, Washington Traffic Safety Education Association, WTSEA; Erin Johnson, WSCFF.

CON: James McMahan, WA Assoc Sheriffs & Police Chiefs.

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