



CONNECTICUT STATE FIREFIGHTERS ASSOCIATION, INC.

March 8, 2021

Senator Steve Cassano, Senate Co-Chair Transportation Committee
Representative Roland Lemar, House Co-Chair Transportation Committee
Senator Heather Somers, Ranking Member Transportation Committee
Representative Devin Carney, Ranking Member Transportation Committee

Members of the Transportation Committee

SUBJECT: SECTION 18 of Raised Senate Bill #982 – AN ACT REVISING MOTOR VEHICLE STATUTES

My name is Ted Schroll, Legislative Representative for the Connecticut State Firefighters Association. Our Association represents approximately 26,000 career and volunteer firefighters in Connecticut. I appreciate the opportunity to address this committee.

The flashing blue light has become the identifier, the distinguishing factor of a volunteer firefighter. I feel safe in saying that a very great majority of these 26,000 dedicated volunteers display a blue light on their personal vehicles.

We respectfully request that you delete Section 18 of this bill, which would expand the use of blue flashing lights to any other group of individuals except volunteer firefighters. Its passage could cause much confusion to Connecticut's motorists, and have a serious detrimental effect on the quality of service provided by volunteer firefighters in the State of Connecticut.

Blue lights were first approved for use by volunteer firefighters through legislative action on May 23, 1951 through Public Act #46 of the 1951 session of the CT General Assembly. It states, *...a blue light may be displayed on a motor vehicle operated by an active member of a volunteer fire department or company who has been authorized in writing by the chief executive officer of such department or company to display such a light, while on the way to the scene of a fire or other emergency requiring his services. Such authorization may be revoked by such officer, his successor, or the commissioner.*

In the regular session of the 1953 session of the CT General Assembly, Public Act #335 was approved on June 11, 1953 which added *or an active member of an organized civil defense auxiliary fire company.*

Until the late 1950's and early 1960's most EMS services were accomplished by commercial ambulance companies. The concept of volunteer EMS and/or ambulance activities started to appear. With these activities came a need for greater recognition. In the 1974 legislative session, Public Act 74-99 was passed by the CT General Assembly, which assigned the green light as recognition for volunteer ambulance association member's private vehicles.

Upon researching the Histories of both 14-96p (Color of Lights. Flashing Lights. Intensity of Lights.) and 14-96q (Permits for Colored or Flashing Lights. Fee), there have been few, if any, substantive changes to these statutes from their inception to date.

Blue light assigned to Fire Service since 1951 – 70 years.

Green light assigned to EMS community since 1974 – 47 years.

COURTESY LIGHTS

In many states these types of lights are called **Courtesy Lights** because they are used to **REQUEST** the right-of-way by volunteer firefighters and EMS personnel to expedite their response in privately owned vehicles. In Connecticut, like most states, other vehicles are not required to yield to the vehicle displaying the courtesy lights, hence the name “courtesy”. Laws requiring permits for those using courtesy lights vary by state. We do not wish to diminish the activities of other groups as each of us has their own mission, but I would question whether a flashing blue light would provide the level of urgency they may feel they need. Most Chief Fire Officers will tell you that there are a number of motorists that will not even move to the side of the road for a large fire truck with **RED** lights. In responding to any emergency, personnel would still be required to stop at any traffic control lights and signs and obey all legal speed limits.

By CT state statute, a vehicle lawfully displaying courtesy lights is not an emergency response vehicle.

In a report entitled **“Report of the Flashing Light Task Force”** pursuant to CT Public Act 03-265, one of their requirements was to study the safety risks and benefits of the use of flashing or revolving lights. One of the risks listed on page 10 of the report states, “There is a lack of awareness on the part of the public of the types of vehicles authorized to use flashing or revolving lights. This is compounded by the number of such vehicles on the road.” Additionally, on page 15 of the same report it states, “The Task Force recognized a lack of public awareness on how to respond to approaching vehicles displaying a flashing or revolving blue or green light”. We feel that this legislation would add to the confusion that already exists.

In researching for this testimony, we noted that there have been numerous legislative initiatives over my years at the General Assembly by various groups requesting a statute change to allow their organization to use flashing blue lights; a military group in 2008; animal control officials in 2016; dive teams, canine search teams, and EMS organizations in 2016. In 2016 Raised House Bill #5406 was proposed and included almost the exact same language as Section 18 of this bill. We were tasked by the then Public Safety committee Co-Chair to do a white paper on the use of blue lights, which we still have in our files. Each attempt seems to move to a different committee. It almost seems like someone is “shopping around” to find the right committee to get this initiative passed. It is unknown who might be initiating this 2021 legislation, but we might ask the following:

Questions Raised Within the Fire Service Community??

- It seems disingenuous of EMS to need a change of colored lights to the same as firefighters after 47 years.
- What are the concerns currently?
- What if desired results are not achieved, will they move to the next color?
- Has the EMS community attempted an awareness campaign to improve the green light recognition?
- One interpretation is that the flashing light permit is local and not effective beyond the boundaries of the municipality of the appointing authority.

Confusion Factor for Motorists

Ex. Fire in one direction, ambulance in other direction

Present – different colors responding in different directions – Motorists understand

If passed – 2 Blue lights driving in opposite directions – Motorists confused

Confusion within Emergency Services

Different colors allow for greater recognition by police officials when needed.

- Present - At incident scenes involving multiple disciplines different colors allow for identification of services on scene.
- If Passed – All emergency personnel have same colored flashing lights. Difficult to determine multiple disciplines at emergency scene.

We would not oppose any attempt by these organizations to use another color of flashing light. In fact, this group already has a flashing green light assigned as an identifier within Section 14-96q of CT State Statute. We respectfully request that the committee delete Section 18 of this bill before passage. We feel it would not accomplish what the teams expect to achieve and will tend to further confuse the motoring public.

Respectfully Submitted

Ted Schroll Jr.

Ted Schroll Jr., Legislative Representative
Connecticut State Firefighters Association

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