
SENATE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Senator Jesse Arreguín, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: SB 349 **Hearing Date:** April 22, 2025

Author: Archuleta

Version: February 12, 2025

Urgency: No

Fiscal: Yes

Consultant: AB

Subject: *Emergency vehicles: blue warning lights*

HISTORY

Source: Author

Prior Legislation: SB 1021 (Archuleta), held in Senate Appropriations, 2024
SB 587 (Atkins), Ch. 286, Stats. of 2017

Support: California Correctional Peace Officers Association

Opposition: None known

PURPOSE

The purpose of this bill is to authorize parole officers to display the blue warning light from their emergency vehicles if they complete a 4-hour training regarding the operation of emergency vehicles, as specified.

Existing law provides that the authority of parole officers extends to any place in the state while engaged in the performance of the duties of their employment and for the purpose of carrying out the primary function of their employment, but shall otherwise be limited as follows:

- 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. (Pen. Code, § 830.5.)

Existing law establishes the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) to set minimum standards for the recruitment and training of peace officers, develop training courses and curriculum, and establish a professional certificate program that awards different levels of certification based on training, education, experience, and other relevant prerequisites.

Authorizes POST to cancel a certificate that was awarded in error or fraudulently obtained; however, POST is prohibited from canceling a properly-issued certificate. (Pen. Code, §§ 830-832.10 and 13500 et seq.)

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 to 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. (Pen. Code, § 13519.8.)

Existing law establishes within the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) a Commission on Correctional Peace Officer Standards and Training (CPOST). (Pen. Code, § 13600, subd. (b).)

Existing law provides that CPOST shall develop, approve, and monitor standards for the selection and training of state correctional peace officer apprentices, and vests CPOST with other duties related to the training and duties of employees under its purview. (Pen. Code, § 13601.)

Existing law provides that CDCR shall adhere to the training standards developed by CPOST at all locations where training is provided. (Pen. Code, § 13602, subd. (a).)

Existing law provides that CPOST shall determine on-the-job training requirements for correctional peace officers. (Pen. Code, § 13603, subd. (b).)

Existing law defines an “authorized emergency vehicle” to include a publicly owned vehicle operated by any federal, state or local agency, department or district employing peace officers, as defined. (Veh. Code, § 165, subd. (b)(1).)

Existing law states that the driver of an authorized emergency vehicle is exempt from a variety of specified 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. (Veh. 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. (Veh. 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, 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 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, as specified. (Veh. Code, § 25252.5.)

Existing law allows any authorized emergency vehicle to display flashing amber warning lights to the front, sides, or rear, and allows a vehicle operated by a police or traffic officer while in the actual performance of his or her duties to display steady burning or flashing white lights to either side mounted above the roofline of the vehicle, as specified. (Veh. Code, § 25259.)

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. (Veh. Code, § 25258 subd. (a).)

Existing law allows an 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. (Veh. Code, § 25258 subd. (b)(1).)

Existing law provides that before a probation officer operates an emergency vehicle with a blue warning light, the officer shall 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 (BSCC). (Veh. Code, § 25258 subd. (b)(2).)

This bill additionally authorizes a parole officer to display the blue warning light from their emergency vehicles.

This bill provides that before a parole officer operates an emergency vehicle with a blue warning light, the officer shall complete a four-hour classroom training course regarding the operation of emergency vehicles that is certified by CPOST.

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 349 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 for all.

2. Blue Warning Lights

California law tightly regulates the use of lighting on vehicles that operate on California roads, including lighting equipped on emergency vehicles. Existing law defines "authorized emergency vehicle" to include any publicly owned vehicle operated by any federal, state, or local agency, department or district employing peace officers.¹ Existing law permits, but does not require, various classes of peace officer to affix a blue warning light to their vehicles, a group that has been expanded over time.² In 2018, the Legislature passed SB 587 (Atkins), Chapter 286, Statutes of 2017, which added probation officers to this list, provided they completed a 4-hour classroom training course certified by the BSCC.

Under existing law, parole officers are not included in the classes of peace officers that may affix a blue warning light to their vehicles. According to the Author, this poses a significant problem:

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 who is suffering a medical emergency. When this happens, every second counts. There have been instances where emergency medical services drivers are unable to locate parole vehicles in an expeditious manner, particularly in traffic.

Parole officers also may 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. In these cases, having blue emergency

¹ Veh. Code, § 165(b).

² Veh. Code, § 25258(b).

lights will allow the officer to navigate traffic in a safe manner while carrying out their duties.

Accordingly, this bill authorizes parole officers to display blue warning lights from their vehicles, and imposes a training requirement similar to that in existing law for probation officers. This bill, however, provides that the 4-hour classroom training course must be certified not by the BSCC, but rather by CPOST, which falls under the ambit of CDCR.³

3. Prior Legislation

This bill is substantially similar to SB 1021 (Archuleta, 2024), which would have similarly authorized parole officers to display blue warning lights from their emergency vehicles if they completed a 4-hour classroom training. However, under SB 1021, the entity responsible for developing that training would have been the Board of State and Community Corrections, not CPOST.

4. Double Referral

This bill was previously heard in Senate Transportation Committee, where it was placed on the committee's consent calendar and passed out by a vote of 14-0.

5. Argument in Support

According to the California Correctional Peace Officers Association:

SB 349 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 --

³ CPOST is generally responsible for establishing standards for training and professional development of rank-and-file state correctional peace officers, as well as first-line and second-line supervisory state correctional peace officers. For more info on CPOST, see their 2024 operating procedures here: [CPOST-Operational-Procedures.pdf](https://www.cpost.ca.gov/2024-operational-procedures.pdf)