
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anna Caballero, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

SB 349 (Archuleta) - Emergency vehicles: blue warning lights

Version: February 12, 2025

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: May 5, 2025

Policy Vote: TRANS. 14 - 0, PUB. S. 6 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Mark McKenzie

Bill Summary: SB 349 would authorize parole officers to display blue warning lights from their emergency vehicles in the performance of their official duties, if an officer completes a specified four-hour classroom training course certified by the Commission on Correctional Peace Officers Standards and Training (CPOST).

Fiscal Impact:

- The Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) would incur unknown, significant one-time costs, potentially as high as the low millions of dollars, to install light bars on parole officer vehicles. These costs would be lower to the extent CDCR only installs light bars on a portion of its parole officer vehicles. (General Fund)
- CDCR would also incur unknown one-time costs, likely in the low hundreds of thousands of dollars, for parole officer staff time associated with completion of the four-hour training course, and for costs associated with the provision of training through CPOST. (General Fund)

Background: Existing law defines an “authorized emergency vehicle” a vehicle owned or operated by a U.S. department or agency when the vehicle is used in responding to emergency fire, ambulance, or lifesaving calls or is actively engaged in law enforcement work. The driver of an authorized emergency vehicle is exempt from a variety of vehicle code requirements if the driver is sounding a siren and displaying a lighted red lamp, and responding to an emergency call, engaged in rescue operations, or in the immediate pursuit of an actual or suspected violator of the law, as specified.

Existing law allows an authorized emergency vehicle used by a peace officer, as defined, in the performance of the peace officer's duties, to also display a steady or flashing blue warning light visible from the front, sides, or rear of the vehicle. For example, police, sheriffs, district attorney investigators, University of California and California State University police, and certain employees at the departments of Parks and Recreation, Forestry and Fire Protection, Fish and Game, Corrections and Rehabilitation, are all authorized to display blue warning lights on their vehicles. Probation officers were added to the list of peace officers that can display blue warning lights by SB 587 (Atkins), Chap. 286/2017, 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 (BSCC).

Existing law extends the authority of peace officers who are parole officers of CDCR, CDCR's Division of Juvenile Parole Operations, and parole agents employed by the Juvenile Parole Board to the following duties:

- 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.

CDCR's Division of Adult Parole Operations (CDCR-DAPO) provides basic training for parole officers through CPOST.

Proposed Law: SB 349 would authorize parole officers to display a steady or flashing blue warning light on their authorized emergency vehicles after completing a four-hour classroom training course certified by CPOST. The bill specifies that it does not expand any existing authority of a parole officer to conduct a high-speed vehicle pursuit, or change existing training requirements for high-speed vehicle pursuits.

Related Legislation: SB 1021 (Archuleta), which was held on this Committee's Suspense File last year, would have authorized parole officers to display blue warning lights from their emergency vehicles in the performance of their official duties, if an officer completes a specified four-hour classroom training course certified by the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC).

SB 587 (Atkins), Chap. 286/2017, authorized probation officers to display blue warning lights from their emergency vehicles in the performance of their official duties, if an officer completes a specified 4-hour classroom training course certified by BSCC.

Staff Comments: This bill is intended to provide parole officers the same authority afforded to other peace officers regarding the displaying of blue lights on their vehicles in the performance of official duties. The author's office notes that blue lights alert other officers on an emergency scene, which can be especially important when a parole officer is transporting someone suffering from an emergency, or assisting other law enforcement during emergencies.

Staff notes that CDCR employs nearly 1,300 parole agents who are regularly assigned vehicles. In addition, recent data indicates that CDCR owns 100 vehicles and leases 1,265 through the Department of General Services for parole officer use. CDCR costs noted above would be related to the installation of light bars on those vehicles and for CDCR parole officers' time to complete the four-hour training course. Since the bill is permissive, and does not explicitly require the training and installation of light bars, it is currently unclear how CDCR would determine whether some or all of its parole officers would be directed to complete the training course, and how many vehicles would be equipped with light bars as a result of the bill.