PA 25-19—sHB 7132
Judiciary Committee

AN ACT CONCERNING NON-SAFETY-RELATED TRAFFIC STOPS, DRIVING WHILE CONSUMING CANNABIS AND EXCESSIVE RECKLESS DRIVING

SUMMARY: This act makes several changes to motor vehicle violation laws. First, the act eases the standard for what constitutes certain license plate, headlight, or windshield equipment violations.

It also sets enhanced penalties under the reckless driving law for violators who drive faster than 100 mph and allows an officer to stop a motor vehicle for a violation of the laws against using cannabis in a vehicle if the officer sees the operator actively consuming cannabis and smells burnt cannabis.

Additionally, the act extends, from 30 days to 60 days, the grace period after a motor vehicle registration expires during which a violation is considered "failure to renew" and subject to only an infraction penalty and not a potential driver's license suspension (§ 6; see Table on Penalties).

Lastly, it makes technical and conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2025

VEHICLE EQUIPMENT VIOLATIONS

License Plate Display

By law, vehicles issued two license plates must display them in a conspicuous place on the vehicle's front and rear. The act allows for the rear plate to be displayed in the rear window as long as the plate's numbers and letters are plainly legible.

The act also eases the standard for what is considered obscuring license plates. Prior law required plates to be entirely unobscured and prohibited placing anything on a vehicle or license plate that obscures any information on the plate. The act instead (1) requires that a plate be substantially unobscured, meaning that an obstruction does not significantly block or conceal it in a way that prevents a reasonable person or an electronic device that records data on or photographs a vehicle or its plate from reading the plate, and (2) prohibits placing anything that obscures the plate's numbers and letters, rather than any information on the plate.

It also eliminates the specific infraction penalty for failing to illuminate the rear license plate with a white light that makes it clearly legible from 50 feet away. Vehicles with these violations may still be stopped and issued a warning for defective equipment, which by law requires the vehicle owner to have the vehicle taken to an inspection station and restored to safe operating condition within the next 10 days (CGS § 14-103).

Headlights and Other Required Lights

Existing law requires motor vehicles other than motorcycles to have two working headlights, one on each side of the vehicle's front, when being driven at certain times (e.g., nighttime or when it is raining or foggy). Not doing this is an infraction (see Table on Penalties). But under the act, if the vehicle has one working headlight, the operator must receive a defective equipment warning for a first offense (subsequent offenses remain infractions).

It also requires violations of the equipment laws on the number, placement, and intensity of lights or other light-related technical specifications that would also be a violation of the use of lights while driving statute (CGS § 14-96a) to be enforced under the equipment statutes and not under the use of lights law.

Windshield Obstructions

The law generally prohibits (1) operating a motor vehicle when the condition of its windshield interferes with an unobstructed view of the road and (2) attaching, placing, or hanging a device, sticker, or ornament on or in a vehicle in a way or location that obstructs the driver's view or distracts the driver.

The act specifies that, in these cases, the windshield's condition or obstruction must significantly block or conceal the driver's view of the road, as measured by what a reasonable person could see. By law, these violations are infractions (see Table on Penalties).

ENHANCED RECKLESS DRIVING PENALTIES

By law, driving faster than 85 mph is considered a reckless driving violation. The act sets enhanced penalties under the reckless driving law for violators who drive faster than 100 mph, as shown in the below table.

Reckless Driving Penalties Under the Act

Driving Faster Than 85 mph and up to 100 mph (Existing Law)	
First offense	$100-$300 fine, up to 30 days imprisonment, or both
Subsequent offense	Up to $600 fine, up to 364 days imprisonment, or both
Driving Faster Than 100 mph	
First offense	$200-$600 fine, up to 30 days imprisonment, or both
Subsequent offense	Up to $1,000 fine, up to 364 days imprisonment, or both

Under the act, if a police officer arrests someone for a reckless driving violation of driving faster than 100 mph who was previously convicted of this violation, the officer must impound the driver's vehicle for a 48-hour period. After this period, the vehicle owner may reclaim it upon paying all related towing and storage costs.

The act also specifies that a person cannot be prosecuted for both speeding and reckless driving for the same offense.

As under the existing reckless driving law, the act's prohibition on driving faster

than 100 mph applies to (1) public roads; (2) roads of specially chartered municipal associations or districts organized under the laws for special taxing districts, a purpose of which is building and maintaining roads and sidewalks; (3) parking areas for at least 10 cars; (4) private roads with speed limits established by the local traffic authority according to law; and (5) any school property.

CANNABIS USE IN VEHICLES

By law, it is a class C misdemeanor to smoke, otherwise inhale, or ingest cannabis while driving a motor vehicle on certain roads or properties, and a class D misdemeanor to do these things as a motor vehicle passenger (see Table on Penalties). However, prior law prohibited peace officers (e.g., state and local police) from stopping a vehicle solely for these violations. The act allows them to do so if the officer sees the driver actively consuming cannabis and smells burnt cannabis odor.