

Senate Transportation Committee

Vivian Hall 271-3091

HB 489, allowing volunteer emergency workers to use a rear facing blue light on their private vehicles when involved in emergency service.

Hearing Date: April 8, 2025

Time Opened: 1:15 p.m.

Time Closed: 1:30 p.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Ricciardi, McConkey, Ward, Fenton and Prentiss

Members of the Committee Absent : None

Bill Analysis: This bill allows volunteer emergency workers to use a rear-facing blue light on their private vehicles when involved in emergency service.

Sponsors:

Rep. Nalevanko

Rep. Aldrich

Rep. J. Aron

Rep. Proulx

Rep. Warden

Who supports the bill: Representatives Rich Nalevanko, Mark Proulx, and Janet Lucas; and Mike Franklin.

Who opposes the bill: Elizabeth Sargent, New Hampshire Sheriff's Association; David Goldstein, New Hampshire Chief of Police; Sarah Burke Cohen, New Hampshire Municipal Association; Officer Matt Amatucci, New Hampshire State Police; David Cawley; Rebecca Garnett; Saralynn Williams; and Selectman Gordan Kemp.

Summary of testimony presented in support:

Representative Rich Nalevanko

- Rep. Nalevanko introduced the bill as a straightforward amendment to RSA 266:78-b iii that would allow for emergency responders to have the resources available to safely and effectively complete their job.
- RSA 266:78-b iii was amended to allow for a single rear-facing blue light on ambulances and fire trucks, which does not apply to first responders operating out of other vehicles.
- HB 489 would allow for a single rear-facing blue light to be used on all first responder vehicles, privately or publicly owned.

- He stated that this would not cost the state any funds and that the bill provides the option for first responders to use a rear-facing blue light.
- This would increase visibility and safety for first responders and citizens.
- Rep. Navelanko claimed this would help volunteer first responders, who consist of a significant portion of New Hampshire emergency responder forces.

Gordon Kemp

- Mr. Kemp showed an example of the size of the light bulbs that would be implemented if the law went into effect.
- He explained that it is a small display of lights and not the full array that law enforcement uses.
- Mr. Kemp explained that he often has to attend roadway incidents with his personal vehicle and struggles to stop traffic because drivers do not respond as well to red, white, and yellow lights as they do to blue lights.
- Sen. Ricciardi asked if any other state has implemented similar legislation. Mr. Kemp responded that there is not a standard for lights for emergency vehicles across the country.
- Sen. Ricciardi asked if Mr. Kemp would be open to a half red, half blue light as a compromise. Mr. Kemp said he would be open to this.

Representative Mark Proulx

- Rep. Proulx testified that he has been a firefighter for the past forty years
- He sponsored RSA 266:78-b iii to allow for fire trucks and ambulances to use a rear-facing blue light.
- As a Deputy Chief, he often takes his personal car to incidents and noted that people do not slow down or move over when they see his car.
- Sen. Fenton asked what color light first responders are currently allowed to use.
- Rep. Proulx responded that they can use red, yellow, and white lights on their vehicles.
- Sen. Fenton inquired where the lights were situated on the car. He clarified they can be both forward and rear facing.
- Sen. Fenton asked if there have been issues with people not slowing down because blue lights were not present. He confirmed it is an issue.
- Sen. Prentiss asked if it was believable that in an article published in 2024 by the U.S Fire Administration, it stated that blue and red lights were the most visible. He agreed.

Summary of testimony presented in opposition:

Matt Amatucci, New Hampshire State Police

- Officer Amatucci stated that the New Hampshire State Police support all first responders but, they are concerned that HB 489 will harm public safety.
- He expressed concern that increasing the number of blue lights available will lead to misidentification and confusion for the public.

David Goldstein, former Franklin Police Chief

- Mr. Goldstein stated he was a police officer for forty-six years and there is always the risk of potential collisions when attending to roadway incidents.
- He expressed similar concerns about desensitizing the public with additional blue lights.
- Sen. McConkey asked if the frequency of the red-light flashes was increased, if it would increase visibility. Mr. Goldstein agreed.

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Date Hearing Report completed: April 14, 2025