

SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

BILL: SB 1598

SPONSOR: Senator Clary

SUBJECT: Emergency Lights on Vehicles

DATE: February 15, 2002

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Vickers	Meyer	TR	Favorable
2.			GO	
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				

I. Summary:

This bill increases the penalty for unlawful display of blue emergency lights while operating a vehicle from a nonmoving traffic infraction to a first degree misdemeanor. The bill also increases the penalty for unlawful display of a red emergency light for persons other than authorized fire or emergency personnel from a nonmoving traffic infraction to a second-degree misdemeanor. Volunteer firefighters who unlawfully display a red light will continue to be cited with a nonmoving violation, but will also be prohibited from serving as a firefighter in this state for a one-year period.

This bill substantially amends the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 316.2397 and 316.2398.

II. Present Situation:

Section 316.2397, F.S., provides that it is unlawful for any vehicle or equipment, except police vehicles, to show or display blue lights. A violation of this section is currently punishable as a nonmoving traffic violation (\$30 fine, no points). Section 316.2398, F.S., authorizes certain volunteer firemen to display a red light on their personal vehicles while en route to the scene of a fire or other emergency. A violation of this section is punishable as a nonmoving violation. In addition, any volunteer firefighter found in violation of this section is subject to dismissal from membership in the fire fighting organization by the chief executive officers.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

This bill amends s. 316.2397, F.S., to increase the penalty for a person who unlawfully displays an emergency blue light on a vehicle from a nonmoving violation to a misdemeanor of the first

degree (up to 1 year imprisonment and \$1,000 fine). Other violations of this section would remain a nonmoving traffic infraction.

This bill amends s. 316.2398, F.S., to allow for display of more visible lighting, increasing the candlepower from 50 to 100 for volunteer firefighters or medical staff. The bill also increases the penalty for unlawfully displaying an emergency red light for persons other than authorized fire or emergency personnel to a second-degree misdemeanor (up to 60 days imprisonment and \$500 fine). Volunteer firefighters who unlawfully display a red light will continue to be cited with a nonmoving violation but will be prohibited from serving as a firefighter in this state for a one-year period.

If enacted, this bill would enhance the penalties associated with unlawfully displaying emergency blue lights or red lights. According to the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, there have been instances when persons have unlawfully displayed blue lights in the commission of criminal acts on unsuspecting motorists.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

This bill increases the penalties for the unlawful display of emergency blue and red lights. In the case of blue lights, the penalty is increased from a non-moving traffic violation to a first degree misdemeanor. In the case of red lights, the penalty is increased from a non-moving traffic violation to a second degree misdemeanor.

C. Government Sector Impact:

This bill could increase revenues to local governments as a result of increased penalties for the unlawful display of emergency lights. However, the fiscal impact is indeterminate.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Amendments:

None.

This Senate staff analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's sponsor or the Florida Senate.
