

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FINAL BILL ANALYSIS

This bill analysis was prepared by nonpartisan committee staff and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.

BILL #: [CS/CS/HB 253](#)

TITLE: Offenses Involving Motor Vehicles

SPONSOR(S): Bankson

COMPANION BILL: [CS/CS/SB 44](#) (Rodriguez)

LINKED BILLS: None

RELATED BILLS: None

FINAL HOUSE FLOOR ACTION: 115 Y's 0 N's

GOVERNOR'S ACTION: Pending

SUMMARY

Effect of the Bill:

The bill makes the following changes related to motor vehicle offenses, including:

- Increasing the penalty if a person drives a vehicle with prohibited lights and stops or attempts to stop another vehicle from a first degree misdemeanor to a third degree felony.
- Increasing the penalty from a noncriminal traffic infraction to a second degree misdemeanor if a person knowingly alters a vehicle registration certificate, license plate, or specified sticker, or knowingly covers or interferes with the legibility of a license plate.
- Prohibiting a person from purchasing or possessing a "license plate obscuring device," a violation of which is punishable as a second degree misdemeanor.
- Prohibiting a person from manufacturing, selling, offering to sell, or otherwise distributing a "license plate obscuring device," a violation of which is punishable as a first degree misdemeanor.
- Prohibiting a person from using a "license plate obscuring device" to assist in committing a crime or escaping from or avoiding detection or arrest in connection with such crime, punishable as a third degree felony.

Fiscal or Economic Impact:

The bill may have an indeterminate positive impact on jail and prison beds by increasing the penalty for specified noncriminal traffic offenses to a second degree misdemeanor, creating new misdemeanor and felony offenses related to license plate obscuring devices, and increasing the penalty if a person drives a vehicle with prohibited lights and effects or attempts to effect the stop of another vehicle, which may result in more jail and prison admissions and offenders being sentenced to longer terms of incarceration.

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ANALYSIS

EFFECT OF THE BILL:

Operating a Vehicle with Prohibited Lights

The bill increases the penalty if a person drives a vehicle and displays a red, red and white, or blue light and effects or attempts to effect a stop of another vehicle from a first degree misdemeanor¹ to a third degree felony.² (Section 1)

Altering or Obscuring a License Plate

The bill increases the penalty from a noncriminal traffic infraction to a second degree misdemeanor³ if a person knowingly:

- Alters a vehicle registration certificate, license plate, temporary license plate, mobile home sticker, or validation sticker issued for and assigned to a motor vehicle or mobile home by mutilation, alteration, defacement, change of color, or any other manner; or
- Applies or attaches a substance, reflective matter, illuminated device, spray, coating, covering, or other material onto or around any license plate which interferes with the legibility, angular visibility, or

¹ A first degree misdemeanor is punishable by up to one year in jail and a \$1,000 fine. [Ss. 775.082](#) and [775.083, F.S.](#)

² A third degree felony is punishable by up to five years imprisonment and a \$5,000 fine. [Ss. 775.082, 775.083,](#) or [775.084, F.S.](#)

³ A second degree misdemeanor is punishable by up to 60 days in jail and a \$500 fine. [Ss. 775.082](#) and [775.083, F.S.](#)

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detectability of any feature or detail on the license plate or interferes with the ability to record any feature or detail on the license plate. (Section [2](#))

License Plate Obscuring Devices

The bill defines a “license plate obscuring device” to mean a manual, electronic, or mechanical device designed or adapted to be installed on a motor vehicle for the purpose of:

- Switching between two or more license plates to permit a motor vehicle operator to change the license plate displayed on the motor vehicle;
- Hiding a license plate from view by flipping the license plate so that the license plate number is not visible;
- Covering, obscuring, or otherwise interfering with the legibility, angular visibility, or detectability of the primary features or details, including the license plate number or validation sticker, on the license plate; or
- Interfering with the ability to record the primary features or details, including the license plate number or validation sticker, on the license plate. (Section [3](#))

The bill prohibits a person from:

- Purchasing or possessing a license plate obscuring device, a violation of which is punishable as a second degree misdemeanor.
- Manufacturing, selling, offering to sell, or otherwise distributing a license plate obscuring device, a violation of which is punishable as a first degree misdemeanor.
- Using a license plate obscuring device to assist in committing a crime or in escaping from or avoiding detection or arrest in connection with committing such crime, a violation of which is punishable as a third degree felony. (Section [3](#))

Subject to the Governor’s veto powers, the effective date of this bill is October 1, 2025. (Section [4](#))

FISCAL OR ECONOMIC IMPACT:

STATE GOVERNMENT:

The bill may have an indeterminate positive prison bed impact by creating new felony offenses related to using prohibited lights to effect the stop of another vehicle and for using a license plate obscuring device to assist in committing a crime or escaping or avoiding detection, which may result in increased prison admissions.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT:

The bill may have an indeterminate positive jail bed impact by increasing the penalty for knowingly altering a vehicle registration certificate, license plate, or specified sticker, or knowingly covering or interfering with the legibility of a license plate from a noncriminal traffic infraction to a second degree misdemeanor, and by creating new misdemeanor offenses relating to a license plate obscuring device, which may lead to increased jail admissions.

PRIVATE SECTOR:

The bill prohibits a person from possessing, purchasing, manufacturing, selling, offering to sell, or otherwise distributing a license plate obscuring device. As such, the bill may have a negative fiscal impact on a person who previously purchased such a device by requiring him or her to dispose of the device, and a person who manufactures or sells such a device by prohibiting him or her from continuing to do so.

RELEVANT INFORMATION

SUBJECT OVERVIEW:

[Operating a Vehicle with Prohibited Lights](#)

[Section 316.2397, F.S.](#), generally prohibits a person from driving a vehicle with any lamp or device attached that shows or displays a red, red and white, or blue light that is visible from directly in front of the vehicle. Exceptions to the prohibition include:

- Police vehicles.
- Fire department vehicles.
- Vehicles owned by the Department of Corrections or a county correctional agency when responding to emergencies.
- Ambulances and other authorized emergency vehicles.
- Specified buses or taxicabs.⁴

A violation of the prohibition is a noncriminal traffic infraction, punishable as a nonmoving violation and a base fine of \$30.⁵ If a person violates the prohibition and effects or attempts to effect a stop of another vehicle, he or she commits a first degree misdemeanor.⁶

[Section 843.081, F.S.](#), prohibits a person from using any flashing or rotating blue light⁷ in or on any nongovernmentally owned vehicle or vessel unless such person is a law enforcement officer employed by a federal, state, county, or city law enforcement agency or is a person appointed by the Governor under ch. 354, F.S.⁸ A violation of the prohibition is punishable as a first degree misdemeanor.⁹

Altering or Obscuring a License Plate

[Section 320.061, F.S.](#), prohibits a person from:

- Altering the original appearance of a vehicle registration certificate, license plate, temporary license plate, mobile home sticker, or validation sticker issue for and assigned to the vehicle or mobile home, whether by mutilation, alteration, defacement, or change of color or in any other manner; or
- Applying or attaching a substance, reflective matter, illuminated device, spray, coating, covering, or other material onto or around any license plate which interferes with the legibility, angular visibility, or detectability of any feature or detail on the license plate or interferes with the ability to record any feature or detail on the license plate.

A violation of the prohibition is a noncriminal traffic infraction, punishable as a moving violation and a base fine of \$60.¹⁰

OTHER RESOURCES:

[Florida Man Used Device to Cover License Plate at Tolls](#)

[States Crack Down on License Plate Flippers](#)

⁴ [S. 316.2397\(2\) and \(3\), F.S.](#)

⁵ [Ss. 316.2397\(10\)\(b\) and 318.18\(2\), F.S.](#)

⁶ [S. 316.2397\(10\)\(a\), F.S.](#)

⁷ The term “flashing or rotating blue light” includes all forms of lights which display a blue light source or which were designed with the intent of displaying a blue light source whether or not such light is actually in use. [S. 843.081\(4\), F.S.](#)

⁸ [S. 843.081\(2\), F.S.](#) Chapter 354, F.S., authorizes the Governor to appoint special officers to protect a railroad or other common carrier doing business in the state. [S. 354.01, F.S.](#)

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ [Ss. 320.061 and 318.18\(3\)\(a\), F.S.](#)