

Connecticut Law on Passing a Stopped School Bus

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Issue

Summarize Connecticut’s law on passing a stopped school bus (i.e., stop arm law) and provide (1) the current penalties, (2) a history of penalty increases since 1980, and (3) proposals to increase the penalty since its last increase.

This report updates OLR Report [2019-R-0199](#).

Summary

Connecticut’s stop arm law generally requires drivers to (1) stop their vehicles at least 10 feet from the front or rear of a school bus that is displaying its flashing red signal lights and (2) remain there until the bus no longer displays the lights.

Any person who violates this law faces a \$450 fine for the first offense. For each subsequent offense, a violator faces a fine of \$500 to \$1,000, up to 30 days in jail, or both. These penalties have changed only twice since 1980, most recently in 2011. Since then, we identified only one bill proposing to increase the penalties. The legislature also recently enacted a law allowing municipalities to establish municipal-level stop arm violations and enforce them with video monitoring systems (i.e., stop arm cameras); municipalities that do so must set a \$250 fine for violations.

“Stop Arm” Laws

The act of illegally passing a stopped school bus with red lights flashing is commonly known as a “stop-arm violation.” This refers to the stop-sign shaped “arm” that extends from the left side of the bus when the red lights are activated.



Connecticut Law

By law, when a driver approaches a school bus displaying its flashing red signal lights, he or she must immediately stop his or her vehicle at least 10 feet from the front or rear of the bus and remain stopped until the bus no longer displays its red signal lights, unless otherwise directed by a traffic officer. At intersections, drivers are generally prohibited from turning toward a school bus that is receiving or discharging passengers. However, drivers on public roads with at least two lanes for traffic separated by a safety island or physical barrier may drive without stopping when meeting or passing a school bus that is on the opposite side of the island or barrier ([CGS § 14-279](#), as amended by [PA 24-107](#), § 1).

As with other traffic laws, police officers may enforce this law upon observing a violation. The law also provides authority for enforcing violations that bus drivers observe. Specifically, the law requires a police officer to issue a written warning or citation to a vehicle owner after receiving a report from a bus driver that he or she observed the owner's vehicle illegally passing a school bus. The report must specify the (1) license plate number, color, and vehicle type and (2) date, approximate time, and location of the violation ([CGS § 14-279\(c\)](#), as amended by [PA 24-107](#), § 1).

State law also allows municipalities to install video monitoring systems (i.e., stop arm cameras) on school buses to enhance enforcement ([CGS § 14-279a](#), as amended by [PA 24-107](#), §§ 2-5). Legislation enacted in 2024 ([PA 24-107](#)) made a number of changes to these provisions, such as (1) sunseting the current statutory authorization, generally by July 1, 2026, and (2) replacing that authorization with a similar one that expressly allows municipalities to adopt ordinances that establish a municipal-level stop arm violation and authorize the use of stop arm cameras to enforce the stop arm law.

Penalties

Current Penalties

Any person who violates Connecticut's stop arm law faces a \$450 fine for the first offense. For each subsequent offense, a violator faces a fine of \$500 to \$1,000, up to 30 days imprisonment, or both ([CGS § 14-279\(b\)](#)). The Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) also assesses four points against a person's driver's license each time he or she is convicted of illegally passing a school bus. However, as is the case with most other traffic violations, if a person pays their ticket without appearing in court (i.e., a nolo contendere, or no contest, plea) no points are assessed against his or her driver's license. DMV suspends a driver's license after a person receives more than 10 points ([CGS § 51-164n\(c\)](#); [Conn. Agencies Regs., § 14-137a-5 et seq.](#)).

The law requires the state to remit 80% of the fines collected from violators to the municipalities in which the violations occur (plus the additional \$25 municipal surcharge that each first offense violator is subject to). The state must distribute the remaining fine revenue into the Special Transportation Fund (12% of the total) and the General Fund (8% of the total) ([CGS § 51-56a\(d\) & \(e\)](#)).

Municipalities that adopt ordinances establishing a municipal stop arm violation and authorizing enforcement with stop arm cameras must also, among other things, (1) establish a \$250 fine for violations and (2) require funds from the fines to be used for improving public safety in the municipality, compensating the municipality's private system vendor (if any), or both ([PA 24-107](#), § 4).

Penalty History

The penalties for state violations of the stop arm law have changed only twice since 1980. PA 80-245 established penalties of (1) a \$100 to \$500 fine for first offenses and (2) a \$500 to \$1,000 fine, up to 30 days imprisonment, or both for subsequent offenses. [PA 11-255](#) set the fine for a first offense at \$450, while the penalties for subsequent offenses remained unchanged.

Proposed Changes

We identified only one proposal to change the stop arm violation penalties since they were last changed in 2011. [Proposed Senate Bill 67 \(2019\)](#) proposed increasing the penalties to (1) a \$1,000 fine and a 60-day license suspension for a first offense and (2) a \$2,000 fine and a six-month license suspension for subsequent offenses. The bill was referred to the Transportation Committee, but it did not receive a public hearing.

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