

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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S.B. 744
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Transportation
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AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

School bus safety has been a growing concern in Texas, with the state recording the highest number of fatal school bus crashes in the nation from 2013 to 2022. In 2023 alone, Texas saw 2,523 collisions involving school buses, resulting in 11 deaths and 63 serious injuries. The illegal passing of stopped school buses remains a significant threat to student safety, with an estimated 45 million illegal passes occurring nationwide in the previous year.

To address this issue, some Texas school districts have implemented school bus infraction detection systems. These systems use cameras mounted on school buses to capture evidence of vehicles illegally passing stopped buses. For example, Austin Independent School District and San Antonio Independent School District have already installed such systems on their buses. These systems have been proven to enhance student safety when riding on school buses as well as driver awareness of the consequences of illegally passing a stopped school bus.

However, current Texas law generally prohibits local authorities from using photographic traffic enforcement systems, creating a legal barrier for widespread adoption of these safety measures. By empowering local authorities to implement the use of these detection systems, school bus safety will be improved, as it would reduce driver violations, and protect students during the vulnerable moments of boarding and disembarking from school buses.

Specifically, the bill creates an exception to the current Texas law that prohibits local authorities from using photographic traffic enforcement systems, allowing school districts and open-enrollment charter schools to install and operate school bus infraction detection systems. The bill also permits municipalities, counties, school districts, and open-enrollment charter schools to issue civil or criminal charges or citations for violations of passing a stopped school bus based on evidence collected from these detection systems.

As proposed, S.B. 744 amends current law relating to the enforcement of the prohibition on passing a school bus using images and video from a school bus infraction detection system.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Section 707.001, Transportation Code, by adding Subdivision (4-a) to define "school bus infraction detection system."

SECTION 2. Amends Section 707.020, Transportation Code, by amending Subsection (a) and adding Subsection (a-1), as follows:

(a) Creates an exception under Subsection (a-1).

(a-1) Provides that Section 707.020 (Photographic Traffic Signal Enforcement System Prohibited) does not apply to a school bus infraction detection system installed and operated by a school district or open-enrollment charter school in this state.

SECTION 3. Amends Section 707.021, Transportation Code, as follows:

Sec. 707.021. USE OF EVIDENCE FROM PHOTOGRAPHIC TRAFFIC SIGNAL ENFORCEMENT SYSTEM PROHIBITED. (a) Creates this subsection from existing text. Creates an exception under Subsection (b).

(b) Provides that this section does not apply to the issuance by a municipality, county, school district, or open-enrollment charter school of a civil or criminal charge or citation, as applicable, for a violation described by Section 545.066 (Passing a School Bus; Offense) based on the use of recorded image-based evidence collected from a school bus infraction detection system installed and operated by a school district or open-enrollment charter school in this state.

SECTION 4. Effective date: September 1, 2025.