

## UPDATE!

### One Light, Two Lights, Red Light, Blue Light

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On Monday, September 25, 2017, Governor Jerry Brown signed into law Senator Toni Atkins' SB 587, the "Blue Light Bill" sponsored by the State Coalition of Probation Organizations to allow probation peace officers to display a blue warning light on authorized emergency vehicles. The bill amends Vehicle Code section 25258(b) effective January 1, 2018 to give probation officers the same authority as most other peace officers to add a steady or flashing blue warning light to department vehicles.

Before SCOPO took action, authorized emergency vehicles driven by probation peace officers were excluded from the list of vehicles allowed to display a blue warning light. Any law enforcement agency vehicle driven by a peace officer is an "authorized emergency vehicle". (Veh. Code § 165.) Those vehicles could display red, white and amber warning lights, but probation emergency vehicles could not display the blue warning light.

Blue lights are essential to officer safety. Blue warning lights on emergency vehicles have been determined in studies by the Society of Automotive Engineers and others to be more visible at night and in sunlight than red, white or amber lights. The blue lights appear to motorists to be closer, thus increasing the warning time to drivers approaching an emergency vehicle. Unlike red lights, blue lights have not been shown to cause a "moth effect" that draws drivers toward, rather than warns them away from, the lights.

With the passage into law of SB 587, emergency vehicles driven by probation peace officers may display the following lights after January 1, 2018:

- **Red:** all authorized emergency vehicles *must* display at least one steady red light visible at least 1,000 feet to the front and *may* display additional flashing, steady or revolving red lights to the front, sides or rear (Veh. Code § 25252)
- **White:** authorized emergency vehicles may display "not more than two" flashing white warning lights mounted on the roof and inside, as well as "wig-wag" headlights (Veh. Code §§ 25259(c), 25252.5)
- **Amber:** authorized emergency vehicles may display flashing amber warning lights to the front, sides or rear (Veh. Code § 25259(a))

- **Blue:** authorized emergency vehicles operated by most 830-series peace officers in California, *including those operated by probation officers*, may display a flashing or steady blue warning light (Veh. Code § 25258(b))

Probation peace officers who use blue warning lights now will be more visible to other peace officers during joint operations as well as to the public at large. SCOPO is indebted to Senator Atkins and to all of the probation association leaders and members who participated in adding this important officer safety provision to the Vehicle Code.

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