

Mass. Lawmakers Aim to Dim Headlight Law

State lawmakers seek to change a law that requires Massachusetts drivers to turn their headlights on when their

House lawmakers unanimously voted to alter a new law requiring Massachusetts motorists to use their headlights while operating their windshield wipers in poor weather conditions.

Transportation Committee Chair Rep. William Straus (D-Mattapoisett) filed a budget amendment that would ensure the requirement is not considered a moving violation, after critics pointed out that could increase a driver's insurance premiums for about six years.

The law, sometimes called the "headlight law," went into effect on April 7. It requires drivers to use their headlights and taillights when their windshield wipers are in use, during poor weather conditions that prevent them from seeing clearly 500 feet ahead of them, and 30 minutes before sunrise and after sunset.

Failing to comply with the law could result in a \$5 fine. But if it remains a moving violation, drivers could pay a lot more than that in insurance surcharges.

According to the language of the House amendment, the fix would "make a violation of the requirement for the use of headlights due to insufficient light or unfavorable atmospheric conditions, not be considered a moving violation or as a surchargeable incident."

The original law was sponsored by Rep. David Linsky (D-Natick) and signed into law by former governor Deval Patrick during an informal session late last year. In a phone call, Linsky told Boston.com the intent of the original law was to encourage safer driving habits, not punish motorists.

"All studies show having headlights on in rain or snow is the safer action and we wanted people to drive that way," said Rep. Linsky, who co-sponsored the amendment with Straus.

Immediately after the law went into effect earlier this month, two Republican lawmakers blasted the requirement as "burdensome" and moved to overturn it. One of those lawmakers, Rep. Jim Lyons (R-Andover), was very satisfied with the latest development in the House chamber.

"Removing the surcharge from the Headlight/Wiper law is a victory for the taxpayers and the drivers of the Commonwealth," Lyons said in an email to Boston.com. "I was very happy that the amendment passed."

A spokesperson for MassDOT told Boston.com the Merit Rating Board (MRB) has so far received 15 citations since the “headlight law” went into effect on April 7. The MRB maintains driving records and insurance claims for auto insurers and government agencies that review transportation and public safety.

Rep. Straus did not immediately return a request for comment.

The amendment is now part of the House budget bill. The Senate will consider its own budget bill next month.

By Sanjay Salomon