



**House  
Legislative  
Analysis  
Section**

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## "DEAF CHILD" TRAFFIC WARNING SIGNS

**House Bill 5960 with committee amendments**  
**First Analysis (9-25-90)**

**Sponsor: Rep. Victor C. Krause**  
**Committee: Transportation**

### **THE APPARENT PROBLEM:**

Current law provides for state and local road authorities to place various types of warning signs along roadways to alert motorists to possible dangers nearby. Although road authorities are required to place certain signs in certain situations, the placement of some warning signs — for instance, "deer crossing" or "deaf child" signs — is optional. Reportedly, a woman whose child is deaf recently requested that a "deaf child" sign be placed near her house when she moved from the city of Kentwood to Plainfield Township. (Apparently, such a sign had been requested and placed by Kentwood at her former residence.) As Plainfield does not itself have a road authority, the request was taken to the Kent County Road Commission whose policy on certain signs (including "deaf child" signs) is that they cause more harm than good; consequently, the request was denied. The incident has prompted some to argue for amending the Vehicle Code to specify that if a parent of a deaf child so requests, a "deaf child" sign must be placed near the child's house by the state or local road authority having jurisdiction over the road.

### **THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:**

The bill would amend the Vehicle Code to specify that, at the written request of a parent or guardian of a deaf child (generally, a person younger than 18 years old whose deafness required him or her to communicate through nonauditory means), the State Highway Commission would have to place and maintain on a street or highway under its jurisdiction and at a site near the deaf child's residence a sign warning traffic of the child's presence in the area. This provision would also apply to a county road commission or other local authority that had jurisdiction over roads. A sign required to be placed by the bill would have to conform to, and be located in accordance with, specifications required by the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices adopted pursuant to the act.

MCL 257.1 et al.

### **FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:**

According to the Department of Transportation, the bill would have a minimal fiscal impact to both state and local government as current law already provides for (though it does not require) the production and placement of this type of sign, and the bill probably would not greatly increase the number of signs needed. The bill's cost to local road authorities would also depend on each one's current policy toward the production and placement of "deaf child" signs. (9-21-90)

### **ARGUMENTS:**

#### **For:**

As the placement of "deaf child" traffic warning signs is now permissive, state and local road authorities vary in their policies on placing the sign. In one recent case the

mother of a deaf child was refused a sign in one municipality even though the road authority having jurisdiction in a nearby municipality (from where she had moved) granted her request for a sign. The bill would require placement of the sign at the request of a deaf child's parent and, thus, would establish uniformity on the issue by all state and local road authorities.

#### **Against:**

Road authorities differ on the issue as studies have not proved conclusively that placing "deaf child" signs (or similar warning signs) actually improves traffic safety. Some people feel the signs encourage a false sense of security in both deaf children and their parents, and that as their use increases along roadways drivers begin to ignore the warning they send. Deciding whether to use such signs requires knowledge in areas like engineering and psychology; by requiring their use at the request of individuals, the bill could prove more harmful than beneficial.

#### **Against:**

The bill could encourage requests for other signs from individuals in similar situations (for physically or mentally handicapped persons), resulting in higher costs for road authorities, clutter along roadways, and a less effective traffic warning system throughout the state.

### **POSITIONS:**

The Michigan Townships Association supports the bill. (9-24-90)

The Department of Transportation does not support the bill. (9-21-90)

The Kent County Road Commission opposes the bill. (9-21-90)

The County Road Association has no position on the bill. (9-24-90)

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