



**House
Legislative
Analysis
Section**

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VEHICLE FRAME HEIGHTS

House Bill 4086 with committee amendments
First Analysis (3-3-87) Floor Copy

Sponsor: Rep. James M. Middaugh
Committee: Transportation

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H.B. 4086 (3-3-87)

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

The Michigan Vehicle Code prohibits modification of a two-wheel drive passenger vehicle in a way that results in the bumper being less than 14 inches or more than 22 inches off the ground. However, four-wheel drive passenger vehicles are not subject to this requirement. Therefore, the bumper height of four-wheel drive passenger vehicles can be as high as the operators would like them to be. When four-wheel drive passenger vehicles are altered higher than the law's standards, the gas tank becomes exposed, often causing the vehicle to catch on fire if a collision occurs. In addition, when an altered four-wheel drive passenger vehicle is involved in a collision with a smaller vehicle, the smaller vehicle can slide underneath the altered vehicle, decapitating the passengers of the small vehicle. Another problem with altered four-wheel drive passenger vehicles is that they roll more easily than unaltered passenger vehicles. Furthermore, altered four-wheel drive passenger vehicles can kick stones and rocks into the headlights and windshields of normal passenger vehicles traveling behind them.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would strike the current bumper height requirements and instead would prohibit operation or modification of any passenger vehicle in such a way that the frame or body floor height would be greater than 23 inches. In addition, the bill would prohibit operation of a motor vehicle (except as provided for passenger vehicles) with a frame or body floor height on which the body floor, as measured at the midpoint between the front axle and the second axle on the vehicle, is more than four inches above the top of the frame. The bill would specify additional permissible frame heights for other motor vehicles, based on the manufacturer's gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR), as follows:

Up to 4,500 pounds GVWR 27 inches

4,501 to 10,000 pounds GVWR.. 30 inches

The bill would also define the terms "frame", "frame height", and "GVWR", and would redefine "passenger vehicle" so as to exclude motor homes and four-wheel drive pickup trucks or other similar off-road recreational passenger vehicles. The bill specifically excludes from the definition of a passenger vehicle "a multipurpose passenger vehicle designed to carry ten passengers or less and constructed either on a truck chassis or with special features for occasional off-road operation" (MCL 257.710c).

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

According to the House Fiscal Agency, the bill would not have any fiscal implications to the state (2-26-87).

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The bill would bring the bumper height requirements for four-wheel drive vehicles into conformity with the requirements for two-wheel drive vehicles. Uniform bumper heights promote driver safety because there is a decreased chance for smaller vehicles to slide under larger vehicles. Further, when an altered four-wheel drive passenger vehicle rolls over there is a greater chance for a fatality to occur. If strictly enforced, the bill could decrease the occurrence of fatalities.

Against:

The bill would unfairly penalize people who live on rural roads and need an altered four-wheel drive passenger vehicle to get to work during bad weather conditions. Some roads in Michigan are "shut down" during the winter, meaning that they don't get graded or plowed very often. Altered four-wheel drive vehicles give people a means of getting to work without risking getting stuck in the winter and spring.

Response: Altered four-wheel drive passenger vehicles have no known advantage over normal four-wheel drive passenger vehicles in terms of getting through snow and mud. In addition, according to the state police, all roads in Michigan are plowed and roads that are on school bus routes are plowed first and more frequently.

POSITIONS:

General Motors Corporation supports the bill (2-25-87).

The Department of State Police supports the bill (2-26-87).