
A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO UNATTENDED CHILDREN IN MOTOR VEHICLES.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that leaving a child
2 unattended in a car can too often have tragic consequences,
3 either because the child suffers from exposure to excessive
4 heat, is injured when the car is stolen, or releases the
5 emergency brake, inadvertently starts the car, or puts the car
6 in gear. On average, thirty-six children per year across the
7 country die in hot vehicles. About forty per cent of those
8 deaths occur when caregivers forget that children are in the
9 car. About twenty per cent of children who die are
10 intentionally left in vehicles by caregivers who do not know any
11 better.

12 The legislature notes that with an outside temperature of
13 approximately eighty-five degrees, the inside air temperature in
14 a car will reach one hundred-thirty degrees or more. Under
15 those conditions, a small child, whose body temperature
16 increases three to five times faster than an adult's, can
17 succumb to the heat in as short a time as fifteen minutes.

18 External temperatures as low as sixty-six degrees can be fatal.



1 As a result, the five-minute trip to the bank that ends up
2 taking a half-hour can be deadly.

3 The legislature further finds that Hawaii is not immune to
4 this problem. Four times within seven months in 2005, children
5 were left in cars that were stolen. Since 2003, three children
6 have died from heat stroke after being left unattended in a car
7 by a parent or caregiver. Parents and caregivers know it is not
8 safe to leave children home alone and unattended, but they
9 continue to leave children unattended in a car even though it is
10 just as dangerous, or more so. Accordingly, the legislature
11 declares that it is the policy of the State that children should
12 not be left unattended in vehicles for five minutes or more.
13 Stronger laws would also give law enforcement a preventive tool
14 with which to work, similar to the effect of seat belt and child
15 safety seat laws.

16 The legislature also finds that under current law, a police
17 officer has only two choices when confronted with children left
18 unattended in a car: either try to educate the parent or
19 caregiver with a stern lecture or call child protective services
20 and initiate a case for child endangerment. Since there is no
21 law prohibiting this conduct, the first option provides little
22 leverage to change it. The second option may be too draconian



1 under the particular circumstances at hand. While current law
2 permits institution of criminal charges in egregious
3 circumstances, a sanction that is less severe is appropriate to
4 deter this conduct when the circumstances do not warrant a
5 criminal prosecution. State law already takes a similar
6 approach to speeding, for example. Police officers are
7 authorized to issue citations for speeding if the circumstances
8 do not warrant, for example, arresting the driver for reckless
9 driving. It simply makes no sense to say that we should not,
10 for example, issue speeding tickets because the driver can
11 always be charged with negligent homicide or manslaughter if
12 someone happens to be killed by the speeding driver.

13 It is the purpose of this Act to protect the children of
14 Hawaii by prohibiting operators and adult passengers of motor
15 vehicles from leaving the vehicle with an unattended child
16 inside for five minutes or more. This Act makes such conduct a
17 violation of the statewide traffic code, not a crime, for which
18 a violator may only be fined. Together with requirements that
19 the knowledge of the prohibition be tested on the driver's
20 examination and that rental car companies provide notice of the
21 prohibition to renters, this prohibition will provide one more
22 tool with which the police may take concrete action to protect



1 Hawaii's children. Although Hawaii has criminal laws that can
2 be used to sanction this behavior when injury or death results,
3 it will be too late for the child in that case. Hawaii needs a
4 way to deter this conduct when the child is not injured or
5 killed, but before the ultimate tragedy strikes.

6 SECTION 2. Chapter 291C, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
7 amended by adding a new section to be appropriately designated
8 and to read as follows:

9 **"§291C- Leaving a child unattended in a motor vehicle.**

10 (a) Notwithstanding chapter 571 or any other law to the
11 contrary, a person violates this section if the person, being
12 the operator or an adult passenger of a motor vehicle, leaves
13 the motor vehicle for five minutes or longer when an unattended
14 child is inside the vehicle, regardless of whether the operator
15 or adult passenger is charged with the care or custody of the
16 child.

17 (b) Any law enforcement officer, firefighter, or rescue
18 team personnel who observes a child left unattended in a motor
19 vehicle and determines that the unattended child is in physical
20 danger, or poses a danger to others, may use whatever means are
21 reasonably necessary to protect the child or others and remove
22 the child from the motor vehicle. If the person who left the



1 motor vehicle with an unattended child inside cannot be located
2 within a reasonable time, the law enforcement officer,
3 firefighter, or rescue team personnel, upon removing the child
4 from the motor vehicle, shall immediately report the matter to a
5 police officer, as defined under section 587-2, who may assume
6 protective custody of the child without a court order and
7 without the consent of the child's family.

8 (c) Law enforcement officers, firefighters, and rescue
9 team personnel shall not be liable in any civil action to any
10 party for any act performed in good faith under this section.

11 (d) As used in this section:

12 "Child" means a person under the age of nine.

13 "Rescue team personnel" means physicians, basic life
14 support personnel, advanced life support personnel, surgeons,
15 nurses, volunteers, or employees of the owners or operators of a
16 hospital or authorized emergency vehicle who have been trained
17 in basic or advanced life support and have been charged by the
18 owners or operators of the hospital or authorized emergency
19 vehicle with providing life support and resuscitation to persons
20 who are in immediate danger of loss of life in cases of
21 emergency.

22 "Unattended" means leaving a child:



- 1 (1) Alone in a motor vehicle; or
2 (2) In a motor vehicle with a minor under the age of
3 twelve."

4 SECTION 3. Section 286-108, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
5 amended by amending subsection (a) to read as follows:

6 "(a) Except as provided in section 286-107.5(a), the
7 examiner of drivers shall examine every applicant for a driver's
8 license, except as otherwise provided in this part. The
9 examination shall include a test of:

- 10 (1) The applicant's eyesight and any further physical
11 examination that the examiner of drivers finds
12 necessary to determine the applicant's fitness to
13 operate a motor vehicle safely upon the highways;
- 14 (2) The applicant's ability to understand highway signs
15 regulating, warning, and directing traffic;
- 16 (3) The applicant's knowledge of the rules of the road
17 based on the traffic laws of the State and the traffic
18 ordinances of the county where the applicant resides
19 or intends to operate a motor vehicle; provided that
20 the examination shall specifically test the
21 applicant's knowledge of the provisions of section
22 291C-___; and



1 (4) The actual demonstration of ability to exercise
2 ordinary and reasonable control in the operation of a
3 motor vehicle.

4 The examinations shall be appropriate to the operation of the
5 category of motor vehicle for which the applicant seeks to be
6 licensed and shall be conducted as required by the director.

7 The examiner of drivers shall require every applicant to
8 comply with section 286-102.5.

9 The examiner of drivers may waive the actual demonstration
10 of ability to operate a motorcycle or motor scooter for any
11 person who furnishes evidence, to the satisfaction of the
12 examiner of drivers, that the person has completed the
13 motorcycle education course approved by the director in
14 accordance with section 431:10G-104.

15 At the time of examination, an application for voter
16 registration by mail shall be made available to every applicant
17 for a driver's license.

18 For the purposes of this section, the term "applicant" does
19 not include any person reactivating a license under section
20 286-107.5(a)."



1 SECTION 4. Section 437D-13, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
2 amended amending its title and subsection (a) to read as
3 follows:

4 "§437D-13 Notice and posting required concerning [~~seat~~
5 ~~belt, child passenger restraint, and operating a vehicle under~~
6 ~~the influence]~~ motor vehicle laws. (a) Every lessor shall
7 display at all times in a conspicuous place in each rental motor
8 vehicle offered to the public, a decal, written in plain
9 language and in no less than ten-point type, that informs the
10 lessee of:

11 (1) Hawaii's seat belt and child passenger restraint laws
12 [~~and~~], the prohibition against operating a vehicle
13 under the influence of an intoxicant[+], and leaving a
14 child unattended in a motor vehicle; and

15 (2) The existence and location of additional information
16 concerning the laws relating to seat belts, child
17 passenger restraints, [~~and~~] operating a vehicle under
18 the influence of an intoxicant[-], and leaving a child
19 unattended in a motor vehicle.

20 The requirements and penalties of Hawaii's seat belt laws and
21 child passenger restraint laws, as provided in sections 291-11.5
22 and 291-11.6, and the prohibition against and penalties for



1 operating a vehicle under the influence of an intoxicant, as
2 provided in section 291E-61, and leaving a child unattended in a
3 motor vehicle, as provided in section 291C- , shall be printed
4 on a card which shall be placed in the glove compartment of
5 every rental motor vehicle offered to the public."

6 SECTION 5. This Act does not affect rights and duties that
7 matured, penalties that were incurred, and proceedings that were
8 begun, before its effective date.

9 SECTION 6. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed
10 and stricken. New statutory material is underscored.

11 SECTION 7. This Act shall take effect upon its approval;
12 provided that sections 3 and 4 shall take effect on October 1,
13 2008; provided further that the amendments made to section
14 286-108, Hawaii Revised Statutes, by section 3 of this Act shall
15 not be repealed when that section is reenacted on January 9,
16 2011, pursuant to section 15 of Act 72, Session Laws of Hawaii
17 2005.



Report Title:

Motor Vehicles; Unattended Children

Description:

Makes it a violation of the statewide traffic code to leave a child unattended in a motor vehicle; requires the examiner of drivers to test driver's license applicants for knowledge of this offense; requires notice of law in rental cars. (SD1)

