

Michigan Auto Law Explains School Bus Safety Laws: What Every Driver Must Know Before the School Year Starts

From the 20-foot stop rule to school zone speed limits, violations can mean fines, points, or even jail time.

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- As students across Michigan head back to school, drivers should review the state's school bus and school zone traffic laws. These laws protect children, but many drivers may not fully understand them.



Michigan law sets clear rules for drivers around school buses and in school zones. Breaking these laws can lead to fines, license points and, in serious cases, criminal charges.

The 20-Foot Rule

One of Michigan's main school bus safety laws is known as the "20-foot rule." Under MCL 257.682(1), drivers must stop at least 20 feet from a school bus when its red lights are flashing. This applies to drivers behind the bus and those approaching from the opposite direction.

It is illegal to pass a stopped school bus when its red lights are flashing. Drivers must remain stopped until the bus starts moving again or turns off its flashing red lights.

There is one important exception. Under MCL 257.682(2), drivers traveling in the opposite direction on a divided roadway do not have to stop. A divided roadway has a raised median, physical barrier or other clear divider between traffic traveling in opposite directions.

However, if a crosswalk or pedestrian walkway crosses the divided roadway, drivers traveling in the opposite direction must also follow the 20-foot rule and stop.

Michigan law does not specifically define what flashing yellow lights on a school bus mean. However, the Michigan State Police recommend that drivers slow down, use caution and prepare

to stop. Yellow lights usually mean the bus is about to stop.

If someone other than the registered owner is driving when a violation happens, the law may presume the registered owner was driving. This means an owner could be held responsible even if someone else was behind the wheel.

Penalties for Violating the 20-Foot Rule

Violating the 20-foot rule is a civil infraction. Penalties include:

- A fine of \$100 to \$500
- Additional court costs
- Double fines if the violation happens in a school zone, which is within 1,000 feet of school property
- No points on the driver's license

Community service is no longer a penalty for this violation following a 2021 change in Michigan law.

Stop-Arm Cameras Are Watching

Many Michigan school buses now have stop-arm cameras. These cameras are mounted on the "stop" arm that extends from the bus when students are getting on or off.

The cameras can capture photos and video of vehicles that fail to stop. They may record the driver, vehicle make and model and license plate from up to 200 feet in front of the bus.

This footage can be used in court against drivers accused of illegally passing a stopped school bus. It can help law enforcement enforce the law even when an officer does not see the violation.

School Zone Speed Limits

Michigan also has special speed limits in school zones. A school zone extends 1,000 feet from a school's property line in any direction.

Within a school zone, the speed limit drops to 20 mph below the normal posted speed limit. However, the limit cannot be lower than 25 mph. The lower speed limit applies for 30 minutes before school starts and 30 minutes after school ends.

That time period could get longer. House Bill 5651, currently pending in the Michigan Legislature, would extend the lower speed limit from 30 minutes to 60 minutes before and after the school day.

Speeding in a school zone can result in a \$200 fine and one to four points on a driver's license, depending on how far over the speed limit the driver was traveling.

Under MCL 257.601b(1) and (5)(c), fines are doubled for drivers who speed in a "school bus

zone." A school bus zone is the area within 20 feet of a school bus that is stopped with its red lights flashing.

When School Bus Zone Violations Cause Injury or Death

Michigan law has much more serious penalties when a school bus zone violation causes injury or death.

Under MCL 257.601b(2), a driver who injures another person while speeding in a school bus zone can face a misdemeanor charge. The penalty can include a fine of up to \$1,000, up to one year in jail or both.

Under MCL 257.601b(3), a driver who kills another person while speeding in a school bus zone can face a felony charge. The penalty can include a fine of up to \$7,500, up to 15 years in prison or both.

Why It Matters

Michigan's school bus and school zone laws help protect children as they get on and off buses, cross streets and walk near schools.

A few seconds of impatience or distraction can have serious consequences. Drivers can face major legal penalties and, more importantly, put a child's life at risk.

As the new school year begins, drivers should remember to:

- Stop at least 20 feet from a school bus when its red lights are flashing
- Never pass a stopped school bus with flashing red lights
- Watch for lower speed limits in school zones before and after school
- Remember that stop-arm cameras may be recording even when an officer is not nearby
- Know that school bus zone violations can lead to much more serious penalties when someone is injured or killed

For more information on Michigan's school bus traffic laws, visit Michigan Auto Law's blog posts on school bus traffic laws and [school zone speed limit law](#).

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settlements and trial verdicts in Michigan. Michigan Auto Law has a 100% satisfaction guarantee, and its attorneys are recognized as national authorities in auto accident litigation, leading the firm to be named "the best in the business" by Michigan Lawyers Weekly newspaper and to being named to "The Best Lawyer's in America" for over 10 straight years. Michigan Auto Law has also been recognized among the "Best Law Firms" in the U.S. and it has earned the Martindale-Hubbell Preeminent AV Rating for Highest Level of Professional Excellence. Michigan Auto Law's mission is to make a real difference in the lives of those they represent and to make Michigan a better and safer place. For more information about Michigan Auto Law, visit www.MichiganAutoLaw.com.

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