

SB 1079 (Portantino)

Vehicles: sound-activated enforcement devices

PROBLEM

Noise pollution is an unwanted or disturbing sound that causes adverse reactions for humans and other living creatures. Exposure to loud sounds, including noise from vehicle exhaust systems, harms our health and wellbeing by contributing to hypertension, hearing loss, sleeping difficulties, increased stress levels, cardiovascular disease, psychiatric disorders, and child development issues.

Since vehicle exhaust systems contribute to harmful noise pollution, they are regulated under the California Vehicle Code. Currently, there is no universal procedure to monitor and enforce these restrictions. This lack of enforcement allows individuals to modify their vehicles with loud exhaust systems, continuing to harm health and wellbeing.

BACKGROUND

Loud noises in the street can disrupt walking or cycling, but also can cause hearing loss and pose dangers to physical and cognitive health. Exposure to loud sounds has been shown to raise levels of stress hormones, including cortisol, adrenaline, and noradrenaline. Chronically high levels of these hormones can impact heart disease, hypertension, stroke, immune responses, and cognitive functioning.

Noise pollution can cause sleep disturbances, which in turn disrupt cardiovascular, metabolic, and psychiatric functioning. It can also impede child development; for instance, noise pollution impacted stress, memory, attention, and reading in children living near noisy airports or streets.

Under California Vehicle Code, exhaust noise is limited to 95 decibels (dbA) for vehicles and 80 dbA for motorcycles. However, vehicle owners can install new exhaust systems or make other vehicle modifications that change the level of sound produced by their vehicle. These illegal modifications are accessible and easily installed at any in-home garage, resulting in much louder noise disruptions than would be allowed by law.

Establishing a mechanism of enforcement for laws related to vehicle noise will not only improve quality-of-life for those living on noisy streets, but will also improve the physical and mental health of adults and children living in California.

SUMMARY

SB 1079 would authorize local jurisdictions to use sound-activated enforcement devices to capture vehicle noise levels that exceed the legal limits.

EXISTING LAW

Existing law requires every motor vehicle subject to registration to be equipped with an adequate muffler in constant operation and properly maintained to prevent any excessive or unusual noise and prohibits a muffler or exhaust system from being equipped with a cutout, bypass, or similar device. Existing law further prohibits the modification of an exhaust system of a motor vehicle in a manner that will amplify or increase the noise emitted by the motor of the vehicle so that the vehicle ex-

ceeds existing noise limits when tested in accordance with specified standards.

Existing constitutional provisions require that a statute that limits the right of access to the meetings of public bodies or the writings of public officials and agencies be adopted with findings demonstrating the interest protected by the limitation and the need for protecting that interest.

SUPPORT

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