



# Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

Department of Transportation

Director's Office

355 Capitol St. NE, MS 11

Salem, OR 97301

**DATE:** February 13, 2017

**TO:** Senate Committee on Business and Transportation

**FROM:** Amy Joyce, Legislative Liaison

**SUBJECT:** SB 35, reporting threshold for property damage-only vehicle crashes

## INTRODUCTION

The Department of Transportation collects crash data from those involved in particular types of crashes. The data is used to make safety decisions. The bill will reduce the volume of low-level crash reports to achieve faster processing of reports that actually are used to make decisions. Efficiencies will be gained in two divisions of the Department of Transportation: Driver and Motor Vehicles Services (DMV) and Transportation Development (TDD).

## BACKGROUND

Current law requires each driver involved in a motor vehicle crash to report the incident to DMV if specific criteria are met. Those criteria include when any person is injured, when a vehicle is towed from the scene, and any time the property damage to one vehicle exceeds \$1500 in value. The last time the law was amended to increase the property damage threshold was in 2003. With inflation over those years, \$1500 in property damage now can be a very minor incident. While the law gives the agency some discretion to raise the threshold, the discretion is not adequate to make a significant change.

DMV compiles the crash incident reports and then provides them to TDD's Crash Analysis Reporting group for analysis and coding into the state's crash data file. TDD's planning staff and the Highway Division use data collected from the crash reports to prioritize engineering safety decisions. The Safety Division uses the data to understand what types of driver errors are causing crashes, and to help focus law enforcement resources. Local government uses our data for similar purposes. Data from the low-level crashes represented by \$1500 in property damage are not used for those decisions. The result is that many staff hours are used to process reports from small crashes so as to comply with Oregon law. This slows the process and delays access to important data from more serious crashes.

## DISCUSSION

The bill will raise the threshold for property damage-only crash reporting from \$1,500 to \$3,000. Raising the threshold would significantly reduce the number of overall crash reports received, but maintain the requirement for the type of reports on which safety and engineering decisions are made. This would result in processing reports more quickly so crash data is available for analysis closer in time to the events, ultimately leading to better safety decisions. The bill will create significant staff efficiency. The data will be analyzed sooner, allowing the agency to

respond more quickly to safety concerns. Staff will spend the same amount of time on this work, but will get to reports closer in time to when the crash happened.

Certainly many customers will now be able to avoid sending a crash report to DMV. Again, the small amount of damage that can result in a \$1500 repair bill to one party may mislead the other party into thinking there is no need to report to DMV.

The -1 Amendment makes changes to the current statute's indexing specification. The current allowance is too small to make a difference over time. The -1 Amendment allows the inflation over a number of years to be taken into account to make an administrative change, rather than limiting the increase to a single year's inflation.

## **SUMMARY**

The department seeks to get more relevant crash data closer in time to when the crashes actually happen. By raising the threshold for reporting property damage-only crashes, lower level crashes that are not used for safety decisions will not be reported. Staff will get to the higher impact crashes more quickly, and this relevant data will be available sooner so as to make better decisions.