

HB 31 -- UNLAWFUL USE OF A LASER POINTER

SPONSOR: Walsh (50)

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Public Safety by a vote of 10 to 0.

This bill creates the offense of using a laser pointer, as defined in the bill, by knowingly directing the light from a laser pointer at a uniformed safety officer, including a peace officer as defined in Section 590.010, RSMo, security guard, firefighter, emergency medical worker, or other uniformed municipal, state, or federal officer. Violation of this offense is a class A misdemeanor.

This bill is the same as HB 67 (2020 1st Extraordinary Session).

PROponents: Supporters say that, throughout our nation, officers are suffering permanent damage to their vision because people are pointing lasers at their eyes, and the statistic is frightening. About half of the states have some sort law prohibiting this. The language in the legislation was kept general rather than distinguishing between green and red lasers and powerful and less powerful so officers do not have to, in the moment, figure out which kind of laser it is. This is also very important because, in the moment, it could look like a laser sight on a firearm, and that could lead to unintended consequences and injuries to the person pointing the laser. Additionally, sometimes damage to vision is not immediately apparent so that can also lead to challenges in determining which kind of laser it is.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Walsh; Mo Society of Eye Physicians and Surgeons; Boone County Fire Protection District and Missouri Task Force 1; Dale Schmidt, Missouri Peace Officers Association; Mark Bruns, Missouri Fraternal Order of Police; Dale Roberts, Columbia Police Officers Association; Tom Robbins, St Louis County Police Association; Missouri State Medical Association; and the Missouri State Troopers Association.

OPponents: Those who oppose the bill submitted written testimony, which can be found online.

Testifying against the bill was Arnie Dienoff.

Written testimony has been submitted for this bill. The full written testimony can be found under Testimony on the bill page on the House website.