

January 11, 2023

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am writing to ask for your support for passage in the 2023 Virginia General Assembly of HB1376 – Amateur Radio Operators – amber lights.

Amateur radio operators or “hams” as we are referred to, provide their own time, equipment, and skill to provide communications services to federal, state, and local governments free of charge in cases of emergencies. There are over 60 Amateur Radio Clubs in Virginia where most all are affiliated with The American Radio Relay League and stand at the ready to assist when asked by their jurisdictions. FREE OF CHARGE.

<https://www.arrlva.com/clubs.php>

Many of these Virginia clubs also provide ham radio volunteers from their clubs to provide communications services as a safety measure for events such as marathons, bike rides, walks, and other events that support charities. All free of charge.

As an example, The Virginia Beach Amateur Radio Club (VBARC) provides communications services for The Shamrock Marathon, The Wicked 10K, The Surf-N-Santa and The Christmas Parade in Virginia Beach, and The Harbor Lights Marathon in Norfolk, VA.

The Arlington Radio Public Service Club and The Vienna Wireless provide the same for The Marine Corps Marathon.

The primary purpose of this bill is to allow the radio operator, if required, to be seen while driving their vehicle along a race course or in an area where there may be runners and/or pedestrians. The amber light provides more visibility and also shows that the vehicle and operator are allowed on the course in that manner. The volunteers drive to their assigned location which can be located in areas where lighting is limited if it is early in the mornings or if there is inclement weather. They usually park off the road where they are in sight of their assigned position. There are times where there may not be enough volunteers on the course to cover the event properly. An operator at mile marker 1 during a marathon can be moved to mile 22 after all the runners have safely passed mile 1. The volunteer operator would then need to drive on the course to the next assignment. The operator may also need to be on the course to pick up a runner if needed. Sometimes there are sprained ankles, or scrapes from falls that prevent the runner from finishing the race.

Current law only allows an amateur radio operators vehicle to use the amber light when the vehicle is not moving or parked. This bill would allow the volunteer operator, when the necessity arises, to use the amber light to be seen if it became necessary for them to move along the course with those running or walking on the course.

In other instances, amateur radio operators stand at the ready and may be asked by their federal, state, or local government to man shelters, assist in assessing damages after tornadoes, hurricanes, or snow storms, and provide "last resort" communications if cell towers and phone lines are knocked down or are inoperable. In these instances, they would also be in their vehicles with their communications gear and amber lights could be a necessity for that purpose.

As this bill encompasses the entire Commonwealth of Virginia, it would benefit all of the clubs that offer volunteers for public service events as well as for assistance for federal, state, and local government. It would also prevent a citation for improper equipment.

This bill does NOT give the amateur radio operator free reign to use the amber light anytime they want to. It could only be used in those circumstances specific to HB1376.

Thank you for your consideration.

Very respectfully,

Keith Howell
KE4KDY – Member Virginia Beach Amateur Radio Club.