

Current status of legislation regarding dogs traveling in vehicles



November 2012

State	Summary of law	Status
Arizona	Drivers with pets on their laps can be charged under existing distracted-driving law.	Enacted
California	The law would have explicitly made it illegal to drive with a dog in one's lap.	Passed by legislature in 2008, but vetoed by then-Gov. Schwarzenegger. (Although the law did not go into effect, the LAPD states that it will ticket people with dogs on their laps for driving at an unsafe speed, arguing that there is no safe speed at which one can drive with a pet on one's lap.)
Connecticut	Drivers with pets on their laps can be charged under existing distracted-driving law; fines range from \$150 to \$400. "No person shall engage in any activity not related to the actual operation of a motor vehicle that interferes with its safe operation on a highway."	Enacted
Hawaii	It is illegal to drive with a pet on one's lap. Per Hawaii Statutes, Section 291C-124, (b): "While operating a motor vehicle, no person shall hold in the person's lap, or allow to be in the driver's immediate area, any person, animal, or object which interferes with the driver's control over the driving mechanism of the vehicle."	Enacted
Illinois	April 2012, the chairman of the Illinois Senate Transportation Committee proposed an amendment to Senate Bill 2653 that would have prohibited driving with a pet in one's lap: "A driver may not hold an animal in his or her lap while operating a motor vehicle."	Proposed and defeated in the state senate (May 2012).
Maine	Drivers with pets on their laps can be charged under existing distracted-driving law. Excerpted from Title 29-A, M.R.S.A., section 2118: "'Operation of a motor vehicle while distracted' means the operation of a motor vehicle by a person who, while operating the vehicle, is engaged in an activity: (1) That is not necessary to the operation of the vehicle; and (2) That actually impairs, or would reasonably be expected to impair, the ability of the person to safely operate the vehicle."	Enacted
New Jersey	Heads of the state's Motor Vehicle Commission and SPCA announced in May 2012 that under an existing statute against animal cruelty (N.J.S.A. 4:22-18), drivers with unrestrained dogs could be pulled over and fined between \$250 and \$1,000 for each offense. Controversy ensued over the interpretation of the law; soon after, rival proposals were introduced in the state assembly—one that would specifically require non-crated cats or dogs to be secured in a seat-belt restraint system (A3221), one that would state that failure to restrain pets in the car is not an offense against animal cruelty law (A3182). Meanwhile, an SPCA spokesman said it is not targeting drivers whose dogs are unrestrained but that the practice is dangerous to both humans and animals.	Existing law on transporting animals uses general language open to interpretation. Summer 2012, rival bills to clarify the state's policy were introduced in the state legislature's lower house; both have been referred to committee.
Oregon	The law would make it illegal to drive an animal in one's lap; the fine would be \$90. Senate Bill 160 "creates offense of driver operation with obstructing animal."	Proposed by a state senator
Rhode Island	The law would make it a distracted-driving violation to drive with a dog in one's lap. Per proposed House Bill No. 7926: "It shall be unlawful for any person to operate a motor vehicle with a dog sitting in the lap of the motor vehicle operator. Any person who violates any of the provisions of this section shall, upon conviction, be subject to a fine of eighty-five dollars (\$85.00); for a second conviction shall be subject to a fine of one hundred dollars (\$100); and for a third and subsequent convictions a person shall be subject to a fine of one hundred twenty-five dollars (\$125). All violations arising out of this section shall be heard in the Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal."	Proposed by a state representative
Tennessee	April 2012, State Rep. Jim Cobb proposed a bill that would prohibit driving with a pet in one's lap, or between the driver and the driver's-side door. Violation would have been a Class C misdemeanor, subject to a \$50 fine and up to 30 days in jail.	Proposed by a state representative; defeated in the state senate.
Virginia	Virginia House Bill no. 533 (2008) would have prohibited driving with an animal on one's lap: "No person shall operate any motor vehicle on the highways of the Commonwealth with an animal on his lap nor shall he permit an animal to impede his free access to and use of vehicle controls or to obstruct his vision."	The bill was defeated (2008).