

Rep. Shankland: Celebrates signing of Amherst-initiated roadside responder safety bill

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AMHERST – Today, Governor Evers signed [Assembly Bill 297](#) into law as 2021 Wisconsin Act 115 at a ceremony at the Amherst Fire District Fire and Rescue Department. The governor was joined by Rep. Katrina Shankland (D-Stevens Point) and other elected leaders, first responders, roadside assistance workers, and construction and utility workers from across the state.

This legislation will create a new emergency response zone and strengthen penalties for traffic violations like reckless driving in areas where emergency or roadside response vehicles are present and personnel are at risk from traffic. The legislation would also ban cell phone use while driving within the area of an incident and would mirror the penalties for speeding, cell phone use, and other infractions in a construction zone. Finally, the bill requires the DOT to educate the public about these changes and the risks associated with failing to move over and reduce speed, or using cell phones in emergency response areas.

Rep. Katrina Shankland, who authored the bipartisan bill, issued the following statement:

“Today’s bill signing at Amherst Fire District demonstrates the power of every person’s voice and how one person can make a huge difference in the world, especially when they inspire others to push for change, too. I’m so proud of our local first responders for their leadership in initiating this bill, and I want to thank them for their efforts to get this bill introduced, passed, and signed into law over

the last three plus years.

“This legislative effort started in August 2018, when Amherst Fire Department Assistant Chief Brian Swan reached out to discuss an incident where a driver crashed into a fire truck in Waupaca. Assistant Chief Swan and Amherst Fire Chief Victor Voss were the driving force behind this bill, and the Plover and Stevens Point Fire Departments also came to the Capitol to support it. Together, we built an impressive bipartisan coalition of legislators and stakeholder organizations to advance the bill in the Legislature.

“Over the years, we have heard repeatedly from firefighters that they would rather run into a burning building than respond to an incident on the highway. They have gear to protect them from the fire; they have no gear to help them if a car hits them going 75 miles per hour. This new law will help prevent incidents from happening by requiring the DOT to educate the public about the new emergency response zone law, while deterring reckless driving through enhanced penalties in an emergency zone.

“I’m proud of the bipartisan work we have accomplished together and the remarkable coalition of partners we built in support of this legislation. It was meaningful to celebrate AB 297 being signed into law at the place where it all started years ago. One person can make a difference, and together, we have made a lasting impact. Thank you to Governor Evers for signing the bill into law in the company of first responders, tow truck drivers, and people from all over our state who understand just how important driver safety is. Let’s make sure our roadside responders always come home safe.”