

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 1008

As Amended by the Senate

Title: An act relating to license plates.

Brief Description: Standardizing issuance of license plates.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Transportation Policy & Budget (originally sponsored by Representatives Robertson, Fisher, Chandler, Hatfield, Johnson, Zellinsky and L. Thomas).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation Policy & Budget: 1/16/97, 1/29/97 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/12/97, 83-13.

Senate Amended.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION POLICY & BUDGET

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 26 members: Representatives K. Schmidt, Chairman; Hankins, Vice Chairman; Mielke, Vice Chairman; Mitchell, Vice Chairman; Fisher, Ranking Minority Member; Blalock, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Cooper, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Backlund; Buck; Cairnes; Constantine; DeBolt; Gardner; Hatfield; Johnson; Murray; O'Brien; Ogden; Radcliff; Robertson; Romero; Scott; Skinner; Sterk; Wood and Zellinsky.

Staff: Jennifer Joly (786-7305).

Background: The 1996 supplemental transportation budget directed the Legislative Transportation Committee (LTC) to develop recommendations regarding motor vehicle license plates. The primary impetus for this review was an inordinate number of bills requesting special license plates for fund-raising purposes.

The LTC established a license plate working group, comprised of six legislators (Representatives Eric Robertson, Chairman; Gary Chandler and Ruth Fisher; Senators Eugene Prince, Mary Margaret Haugen and Pat Thibaudeau), to spearhead the review. The working group met four times during the interim and developed legislative recommendations aimed at curtailing the number of special license plates.

Summary of Bill: Special license plates may be issued from currently existing series, but the creation of additional special license plate series is prohibited. Furthermore, following an initial issuance period of three years, the DOL is granted the authority to discontinue a special license plate series if sales are nominal.

Except for collector vehicle license plates issued prior to January 1, 1987, Congressional Medal of Honor license plates, and license plates issued for commercial vehicles with a gross weight in excess of 26,000 pounds, all license plates shall be issued on a standard background designated by the DOL, effective January 1, 2001.

With a few exceptions (primarily for military service recognition plates), effective January 1, 1998, the original fees for special license plates are set at \$40, with \$12 earmarked for DOL's administrative costs. Effective January 1, 1999, special license plate renewals are set at \$30, with \$2 earmarked for DOL.

Free special license plates (including motor vehicle excise tax exemption) which have been issued to disabled veterans, prisoners of war (POWs), the surviving spouses of POWs, and Congressional Medal of Honor recipients may continue to be used on either passenger vehicles or motor homes. However, prospective recipients of free special license plates may use them only on standard passenger vehicles.

To ensure maximum legibility and reflectivity, the DOL shall periodically provide for the replacement of license plates.

EFFECT OF SENATE AMENDMENT(S): Free special license plates (including MVET exemption) are currently issued to: disabled veterans, POWs, the surviving spouses of POWs, and Congressional Medal of Honor recipients. This amendment eliminates the restriction that prospective recipients of free special license plates only use them on standard passenger vehicles (i.e., allows use of free special license plates on motor homes).

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 10, 1997.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Special license plates detract from the purpose of license plates-- vehicle identification. Due to the increasing number of special plates, plus the small size of the logos used on them, special license plates have become difficult for law enforcement to decipher. Periodic replacement of license plates will ensure visibility.

Testimony Against: Veterans who receive free special license plates should be able to retain the privilege of using them on motor homes. The fees for special license plates should not be raised. A fee increase is unwarranted, given the popularity of the Washington State University (WSU) collegiate license plate. That is, the WSU collegiate plate has surpassed the original sales projections; and the current fee conforms with the amount originally negotiated with the DOL for production and administration.

Testified: Adolfo Capestany, Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs (con); Captain Marsh Pugh, Washington State Patrol (pro); and Larry Ganders, Washington State University (con).