
HOUSE BILL 1655

State of Washington 62nd Legislature 2011 Regular Session

By Representatives Ahern, Warnick, Klippert, McCune, Angel, Rivers, Hargrove, Johnson, Nealey, Fagan, Haler, Schmick, Bailey, and Condotta

Read first time 01/28/11. Referred to Committee on Transportation.

1 AN ACT Relating to the requirement to periodically replace license
2 plates; and amending RCW 46.16A.200.

3 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

4 **Sec. 1.** RCW 46.16A.200 and 2010 c 161 s 422 are each amended to
5 read as follows:

6 (1) **Design.** All license plates may be obtained by the director
7 from the metal working plant of a state correctional facility or from
8 any source in accordance with existing state of Washington purchasing
9 procedures. License plates:

10 (a) May vary in background, color, and design;

11 (b) Must be legible and clearly identifiable as a Washington state
12 license plate;

13 (c) Must designate the name of the state of Washington without
14 abbreviation;

15 (d) Must be treated with fully reflectorized materials designed to
16 increase visibility and legibility at night;

17 (e) Must be of a size and color and show the registration period as
18 determined by the director; and

1 (f) May display a symbol or artwork approved by the special license
2 plate review board and the legislature.

3 (2) **Exceptions to reflectorized materials.** License plates issued
4 before January 1, 1968, are not required to be treated with
5 reflectorized materials.

6 (3) **Dealer license plates.** License plates issued to a dealer must
7 contain an indication that the license plates have been issued to a
8 vehicle dealer.

9 (4)(a) **Furnished.** The director shall furnish to all persons making
10 satisfactory application for a vehicle registration:

11 (i) Two identical license plates each containing the license plate
12 number; or

13 (ii) One license plate if the vehicle is a trailer, semitrailer,
14 camper, moped, collector vehicle, horseless carriage, or motorcycle.

15 (b) The director may adopt types of license plates to be used as
16 long as the license plates are legible.

17 (5)(a) **Display.** License plates must be:

18 (i) Attached conspicuously at the front and rear of each vehicle if
19 two license plates have been issued;

20 (ii) Attached to the rear of the vehicle if one license plate has
21 been issued;

22 (iii) Kept clean and be able to be plainly seen and read at all
23 times; and

24 (iv) Attached in a horizontal position at a distance of not more
25 than four feet from the ground.

26 (b) The Washington state patrol may grant exceptions to this
27 subsection if the body construction of the vehicle makes compliance
28 with this section impossible.

29 (6) **Change of license classification.** A person who has altered a
30 vehicle that makes the current license plate or plates invalid for the
31 vehicle's use shall:

32 (a) Surrender the current license plate or plates to the
33 department, county auditor or other agent, or subagent appointed by the
34 director;

35 (b) Apply for a new license plate or plates; and

36 (c) Pay a change of classification fee required under RCW
37 46.17.310.

38 (7) **Unlawful acts.** It is unlawful to:

1 (a) Display a license plate or plates on the front or rear of any
2 vehicle that were not issued by the director for the vehicle;

3 (b) Display a license plate or plates on any vehicle that have been
4 changed, altered, or disfigured, or have become illegible;

5 (c) Use holders, frames, or other materials that change, alter, or
6 make a license plate or plates illegible. License plate frames may be
7 used on license plates only if the frames do not obscure license tabs
8 or identifying letters or numbers on the plates and the license plates
9 can be plainly seen and read at all times;

10 (d) Operate a vehicle unless a valid license plate or plates are
11 attached as required under this section;

12 (e) Transfer a license plate or plates issued under this chapter
13 between two or more vehicles without first making application to
14 transfer the license plates. A violation of this subsection (7)(e) is
15 a traffic infraction subject to a fine not to exceed five hundred
16 dollars. Any law enforcement agency that determines that a license
17 plate or plates have been transferred between two or more vehicles
18 shall confiscate the license plate or plates and return them to the
19 department for nullification along with full details of the reasons for
20 confiscation. Each vehicle identified in the transfer will be issued
21 a new license plate or plates upon application by the owner or owners
22 and the payment of full fees and taxes; or

23 (f) Fail, neglect, or refuse to endorse the registration
24 certificate and deliver the license plate or plates to the purchaser or
25 transferee of the vehicle, except as authorized under this section.

26 (8) **Transfer.** (a) Standard issue license plates follow the vehicle
27 when ownership of the vehicle changes unless the registered owner
28 wishes to retain the license plates and transfer them to a replacement
29 vehicle of the same use. A registered owner wishing to keep standard
30 issue license plates shall pay the license plate transfer fee required
31 under RCW 46.17.200(1)(c) when applying for license plate transfer.

32 (b) Special license plates may be treated in the same manner as
33 described in (a) of this subsection unless otherwise limited by law.

34 (c) License plates issued to the state or any county, city, town,
35 school district, or other political subdivision entitled to exemption
36 as provided by law may be treated in the same manner as described in
37 (a) of this subsection.

1 (9) **Replacement.** (a) An owner or the owner's authorized
2 representative shall apply for a replacement license plate or plates if
3 the current license plate or plates assigned to the vehicle have been
4 lost, defaced, or destroyed, or if one or both plates have become so
5 illegible or are in such a condition as to be difficult to distinguish.
6 An owner or the owner's authorized representative may apply for a
7 replacement license plate or plates at any time the owner chooses.

8 (b) The application for a replacement license plate or plates must:

9 (i) Be on a form furnished or approved by the director; and

10 (ii) Be accompanied by the fee required under RCW 46.17.200(1)(a).

11 (c) The department shall not require the payment of any fee to
12 replace a license plate or plates for vehicles owned, rented, or leased
13 by foreign countries or international bodies to which the United States
14 government is a signatory by treaty.

15 (10)(a) **Periodic replacement.** (~~License plates must be replaced~~
16 ~~periodically~~) To ensure maximum legibility and reflectivity, the
17 department may replace license plates upon request of the current
18 vehicle owner if the functional lifetime of the license plates has been
19 exceeded. The department shall:

20 (i) Not require the replacement of license plates at other times;

21 (ii) Use empirical studies documenting the longevity of the
22 reflective materials used to make license plates to establish the
23 functional lifetime of a license plate;

24 (~~(ii) Determine how frequently license plates must be replaced;~~)

25 and

26 (iii) Offer to owners the option of retaining the current license
27 plate number when obtaining replacement license plates for the fee
28 required in RCW 46.17.200(1)(b).

29 (b) Commercial motor vehicles with a gross weight in excess of
30 twenty-six thousand pounds are exempt from periodic license plate
31 replacement.

32 (c) The department may, upon the transfer of a vehicle, require the
33 new vehicle owner to replace the license plates at the same time the
34 new owner registers the vehicle if the vehicle's existing license
35 plates have exceeded their functional lifetime.

36 (11) **Periodic replacement--Exceptions.** The following license
37 plates are not required to be periodically replaced (~~as required in~~
38 ~~subsection (10) of this section~~):

1 (a) Horseless carriage license plates issued under RCW 46.18.255
2 before January 1, 1987;

3 (b) Congressional Medal of Honor license plates issued under RCW
4 46.18.230;

5 (c) License plates for commercial motor vehicles with a gross
6 weight greater than twenty-six thousand pounds.

7 (12) **Rules.** The department may adopt rules to implement this
8 section.

9 (13) **Tabs or emblems.** The director may issue tabs or emblems to be
10 attached to license plates or elsewhere on the vehicle to signify
11 initial registration and renewals. Renewals become effective when tabs
12 or emblems have been issued and properly displayed on license plates.

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