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SENATE BILL 6471

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State of Washington

62nd Legislature

2012 Regular Session

By Senators Rolfes and Ericksen

Read first time 01/25/12. Referred to Committee on Transportation.

1 AN ACT Relating to license plates on the front of vehicles;  
2 amending RCW 46.16A.200; creating a new section; and providing an  
3 effective date.

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

5 **Sec. 1.** RCW 46.16A.200 and 2011 c 171 s 46 are each amended to  
6 read as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 (f) Before July 1, 2010, may display a symbol or artwork approved  
2 by the former special license plate review board and the legislature.  
3 Beginning July 1, 2010, special license plate series approved by the  
4 department and enacted into law by the legislature may display a symbol  
5 or artwork approved by the department.

6 (2) **Exceptions to reflectorized materials.** License plates issued  
7 before January 1, 1968, are not required to be treated with  
8 reflectorized materials.

9 (3) **Dealer license plates.** License plates issued to a dealer must  
10 contain an indication that the license plates have been issued to a  
11 vehicle dealer.

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

14 (i) Two identical license plates each containing the license plate  
15 number; ((~~or~~))

16 (ii) One license plate if the vehicle is a trailer, semitrailer,  
17 camper, moped, collector vehicle, horseless carriage, or motorcycle; or

18 (iii) One license plate if the registered owner of the vehicle  
19 requests only a license plate for the rear of the vehicle for privacy  
20 purposes, because the vehicle is a collector vehicle, or because the  
21 design of the vehicle is not conducive for the placement of a license  
22 plate on the front of the vehicle.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

37 (6) **Change of license classification.** A person who has altered a

1 vehicle that makes the current license plate or plates invalid for the  
2 vehicle's use shall:

3 (a) Surrender the current license plate or plates to the  
4 department, county auditor or other agent, or subagent appointed by the  
5 director;

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

7 (c) Pay a change of classification fee required under RCW  
8 46.17.310.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

35 (8) **Transfer.** (a) Standard issue license plates follow the vehicle  
36 when ownership of the vehicle changes unless the registered owner  
37 wishes to retain the license plates and transfer them to a replacement

1 vehicle of the same use. A registered owner wishing to keep standard  
2 issue license plates shall pay the license plate transfer fee required  
3 under RCW 46.17.200(1)(c) when applying for license plate transfer.

4 (b) Special license plates and personalized license plates may be  
5 treated in the same manner as described in (a) of this subsection  
6 unless otherwise limited by law.

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

11 (9) **Replacement.** (a) An owner or the owner's authorized  
12 representative shall apply for a replacement license plate or plates if  
13 the current license plate or plates assigned to the vehicle have been  
14 lost, defaced, or destroyed, or if one or both plates have become so  
15 illegible or are in such a condition as to be difficult to distinguish.  
16 An owner or the owner's authorized representative may apply for a  
17 replacement license plate or plates at any time the owner chooses.

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

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

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

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

25 (10) **Periodic replacement.** License plates must be replaced  
26 periodically to ensure maximum legibility and reflectivity. The  
27 department shall:

28 (a) Use empirical studies documenting the longevity of the  
29 reflective materials used to make license plates;

30 (b) Determine how frequently license plates must be replaced; and

31 (c) Offer to owners the option of retaining the current license  
32 plate number when obtaining replacement license plates for the fee  
33 required in RCW 46.17.200(1)(b).

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

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

1 (b) Congressional Medal of Honor license plates issued under RCW  
2 46.18.230;

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

5 (12) **Rules.** The department may adopt rules to implement this  
6 section.

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

11 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** Section 1 of this act applies to vehicle  
12 registrations that are due or become due on or after August 1, 2012.

13 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** This act takes effect August 1, 2012.

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