
HOUSE BILL 1991

State of Washington 66th Legislature 2019 Regular Session

By Representatives Lovick, Fey, Sells, and Valdez

Read first time 02/11/19. Referred to Committee on Transportation.

1 AN ACT Relating to digital license plates; reenacting and
2 amending RCW 46.16A.200; and adding a new section to chapter 46.04
3 RCW.

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

5 **Sec. 1.** RCW 46.16A.200 and 2014 c 181 s 2 and 2014 c 80 s 1 are
6 each reenacted and amended to 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. The director may also approve the use of digital license
11 plates, as defined in section 2 of this act. Except as provided in
12 subsection (4) of this section, license plates:

- 13 (a) May vary in background, color, and design;
- 14 (b) Must be legible and clearly identifiable as a Washington
15 state license plate;
- 16 (c) Must designate the name of the state of Washington without
17 abbreviation;
- 18 (d) Must be treated with fully reflectorized materials designed
19 to increase visibility and legibility at night;
- 20 (e) Must be of a size and color and show the registration period
21 as 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
5 symbol or artwork approved by the department.

6 (2) **Exceptions to reflectorized materials.** License plates issued
7 before January 1, 1968, or digital license plates approved by the
8 director, are not required to be treated with reflectorized
9 materials.

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

13 (4) **Digital license plates.** The digital license plate design must
14 be consistent with the plate design issued to the customer by the
15 department. Any changes to the plate design that are required for
16 proper rendering of the digital license plate must be approved by the
17 department. Digital license plates must meet the following
18 requirements:

19 (a) Be visible at all times, including while the vehicle is
20 parked or turned off;

21 (b) The letters and numbers must be of sufficient size to be
22 plainly readable during daylight hours from a distance of one hundred
23 feet;

24 (c) The display device must be visible at night and not obstruct
25 the vehicle's equipped illumination light or must contain an internal
26 light source; and

27 (d) Must contain a user selectable feature that may be turned on
28 or off as to whether the license plate collects or stores vehicle
29 location and telemetry information.

30 (5)(a) **Furnished.** The director shall furnish to all persons
31 making satisfactory application for a vehicle registration:

32 (i) Two identical license plates each containing the license
33 plate number; or

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

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

38 (c) The director may issue one metal plate to be attached to the
39 front of the vehicle if an approved digital license plate is affixed
40 to the rear of the vehicle.

1 ~~((5))~~ (6) (a) **Display.** License plates must be:
2 (i) Attached conspicuously at the front and rear of each vehicle
3 if two license plates have been issued;
4 (ii) Attached to the rear of the vehicle if one license plate has
5 been issued;
6 (iii) Kept clean and be able to be plainly seen and read at all
7 times; and
8 (iv) Attached in a horizontal position at a distance of not more
9 than four feet from the ground.
10 (b) The Washington state patrol may grant exceptions to this
11 subsection if the body construction of the vehicle makes compliance
12 with this section impossible.
13 ~~((6))~~ (7) **Change of license classification.** A person who has
14 altered a vehicle that makes the current license plate or plates
15 invalid for the vehicle's use shall:
16 (a) Surrender the current license plate or plates to the
17 department, county auditor or other agent, or subagent appointed by
18 the director;
19 (b) Apply for a new license plate or plates; and
20 (c) Pay a change of classification fee required under RCW
21 46.17.310.
22 ~~((7))~~ (8) **Unlawful acts.** It is unlawful to:
23 (a) Display a license plate or plates on the front or rear of any
24 vehicle that were not issued by the director for the vehicle;
25 (b) Display a license plate or plates on any vehicle that have
26 been changed, altered, or disfigured, or have become illegible;
27 (c) Use holders, frames, or other materials that change, alter,
28 or make a license plate or plates illegible. License plate frames may
29 be used on license plates only if the frames do not obscure license
30 tabs or identifying letters or numbers on the plates and the license
31 plates can be plainly seen and read at all times;
32 (d) Operate a vehicle unless a valid license plate or plates are
33 attached as required under this section;
34 (e) Transfer a license plate or plates issued under this chapter
35 between two or more vehicles without first making application to
36 transfer the license plates. A violation of this subsection ~~((7))~~
37 (8)(e) is a traffic infraction subject to a fine not to exceed five
38 hundred dollars. Any law enforcement agency that determines that a
39 license plate or plates have been transferred between two or more
40 vehicles shall confiscate the license plate or plates and return them

1 to the department for nullification along with full details of the
2 reasons for confiscation. Each vehicle identified in the transfer
3 will be issued a new license plate or plates upon application by the
4 owner or owners and the payment of full fees and taxes; or

5 (f) Fail, neglect, or refuse to endorse the registration
6 certificate, except as authorized under this section.

7 ~~((8))~~ (9) **Transfer.** (a) Standard issue license plates must be
8 replaced when ownership of the vehicle changes, pursuant to
9 subsection ~~((9))~~ (10)(a)(i) of this section, but the registered
10 owner may retain the license plates and transfer them to a
11 replacement vehicle of the same use. In addition to all other taxes
12 and fees due upon change in ownership, a registered owner wishing to
13 keep standard issue license plates shall pay the license plate
14 transfer fee required under RCW 46.17.200(1)(c) when applying for
15 license plate transfer.

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

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

23 (d) License plate replacement is not required when a change in
24 vehicle ownership is the result of one or more of the following
25 circumstances:

26 (i) When adding a lienholder to the certificate of title or
27 removing a lienholder from the certificate of title;

28 (ii) When a vehicle is transferred from one spouse or registered
29 domestic partner to another;

30 (iii) When removing a deceased spouse or registered domestic
31 partner from the certificate of title;

32 (iv) When a vehicle is transferred by gift or inheritance to one
33 or more members of the registered owner's immediate family;

34 (v) When a vehicle is transferred into or out of a trust in which
35 the registered owner or one or more immediate family members of the
36 registered owner is the beneficiary;

37 (vi) When a leaseholder buys out the leased vehicle; or

38 (vii) When a person changes his or her name.

39 ~~((9))~~ (10) **Replacement.** (a) Except as provided in subsection
40 ~~((8))~~ (9)(a) of this section, an owner or the owner's authorized

1 representative must apply for a replacement license plate or plates:
2 (i) When taking ownership of the vehicle; (ii) if the current license
3 plate or plates assigned to the vehicle have been lost, defaced, or
4 destroyed; or (iii) if one or both plates have become so illegible or
5 are in such a condition as to be difficult to distinguish. An owner
6 or the owner's authorized representative may apply for a replacement
7 license plate or plates at any time the owner chooses. The department
8 shall offer to owners the option of retaining the current license
9 plate number when obtaining replacement license plates for the fee
10 required in RCW 46.17.200(1)(b).

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

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

14 (ii) Be accompanied by the fee required under RCW
15 46.17.200(1)(a).

16 (c) When a vehicle is sold to a vehicle dealer for resale, the
17 application for a replacement plate or plates need not be made until
18 the vehicle is sold by the vehicle dealer.

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

23 ~~((10))~~ (11) **Replacement—Exceptions.** The following license
24 plates are not required to be replaced as required in subsection
25 ~~((9))~~ (10) of this section:

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

28 (b) Medal of Honor license plates issued under RCW 46.18.230;

29 (c) License plates for commercial motor vehicles with a gross
30 weight greater than twenty-six thousand pounds;

31 (d) Digital license plates, as defined in section 2 of this act.

32 ~~((11))~~ (12) **Rules.** The department may adopt rules to implement
33 this section.

34 ~~((12))~~ (13) **Tabs or emblems.** The director may issue tabs or
35 emblems to be attached to license plates or elsewhere on the vehicle
36 to signify initial registration and renewals. Renewals become
37 effective when tabs or emblems have been issued and properly
38 displayed.

1 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 46.04
2 RCW to read as follows:
3 "Digital license plate" means a license plate that: (1) Displays
4 the letters and numbers assigned to the vehicle by the department,
5 the name of the state, and any other information required by the
6 department, in the manner prescribed by the department; (2) produces
7 a crisp, bright, reflective screen; and (3) is certified as an
8 automotive grade IP66 product.

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