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HOUSE BILL 2481

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State of Washington

66th Legislature

2020 Regular Session

By Representatives Thai, Doglio, and Ryu

Read first time 01/15/20. Referred to Committee on Transportation.

1 AN ACT Relating to establishing exceptions to trailer license  
2 plate display requirements; and reenacting and amending RCW  
3 46.16A.200.

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. License plates:

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

12 (b) Must be legible and clearly identifiable as a Washington  
13 state 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  
17 to increase visibility and legibility at night;

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

20 (f) Before July 1, 2010, may display a symbol or artwork approved  
21 by the former special license plate review board and the legislature.

1 Beginning July 1, 2010, special license plate series approved by the  
2 department and enacted into law by the legislature may display a  
3 symbol or artwork approved by the department.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

23 (iii) Kept clean and be able to be plainly seen and read at all  
24 times unless an exception in (c) of this subsection applies; and

25 (iv) Attached in a horizontal position at a distance of not more  
26 than four feet from the ground unless an exception in (d) of this  
27 subsection applies.

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

31 (c) (i) If the applicable requirements of (c) (ii) of this  
32 subsection are met, the display of a single license plate attached to  
33 a trailer in accordance with (a) (ii) of this subsection and meeting  
34 any applicable trailer license plate requirements under this chapter  
35 may be obstructed by a device for transporting a forklift used for  
36 product delivery purposes.

37 (ii) The obstruction of a single license plate under (c) (i) of  
38 this subsection is only authorized if the following requirements are  
39 met:

1       (A) The device is installed according to manufacturer  
2 specifications or generally accepted installation practices.

3       (B) The device does not prevent the license plate from being read  
4 from one or more accessible viewing angles.

5       (d) For purposes of license plate visibility, provided that a  
6 trailer meets any applicable trailer license plate requirements under  
7 this chapter, the single trailer license plate may be relocated on  
8 the trailer or the connected truck tractor to a position that is more  
9 than four feet from the ground.

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

13       (a) Surrender the current license plate or plates to the  
14 department, county auditor or other agent, or subagent appointed by  
15 the director;

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

17       (c) Pay a change of classification fee required under RCW  
18 46.17.310.

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

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

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

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

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

31       (e) Transfer a license plate or plates issued under this chapter  
32 between two or more vehicles without first making application to  
33 transfer the license plates. A violation of this subsection (7)(e) is  
34 a traffic infraction subject to a fine not to exceed five hundred  
35 dollars. Any law enforcement agency that determines that a license  
36 plate or plates have been transferred between two or more vehicles  
37 shall confiscate the license plate or plates and return them to the  
38 department for nullification along with full details of the reasons  
39 for confiscation. Each vehicle identified in the transfer will be

1 issued a new license plate or plates upon application by the owner or  
2 owners and the payment of full fees and taxes; or

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

36 (9) **Replacement.** (a) Except as provided in subsection (8)(a) of  
37 this section, an owner or the owner's authorized representative must  
38 apply for a replacement license plate or plates: (i) When taking  
39 ownership of the vehicle; (ii) if the current license plate or plates  
40 assigned to the vehicle have been lost, defaced, or destroyed; or

1 (iii) if one or both plates have become so illegible or are in such a  
2 condition as to be difficult to distinguish. An owner or the owner's  
3 authorized representative may apply for a replacement license plate  
4 or plates at any time the owner chooses. The department shall offer  
5 to owners the option of retaining the current license plate number  
6 when obtaining replacement license plates for the fee required in RCW  
7 46.17.200(1)(b).

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

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

11 (ii) Be accompanied by the fee required under RCW  
12 46.17.200(1)(a).

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

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

20 (10) **Replacement—Exceptions.** The following license plates are not  
21 required to be replaced as required in subsection (9) of this  
22 section:

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

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

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

28 (11) **Rules.** The department may adopt rules to implement this  
29 section.

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

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