

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5406

---

---

As of February 15, 2021

**Title:** An act relating to compensation for tow truck operators for keeping the public roadways clear.

**Brief Description:** Providing compensation for tow truck operators for keeping the public roadways clear.

**Sponsors:** Senators Hawkins, Mullet, Brown, Dozier, Fortunato, Hobbs, Honeyford, Hunt, Rolfes, Schoesler, Short, Stanford, Warnick and Wilson, J..

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Transportation: 2/15/21.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Authorizes a registered tow truck operator, dispatched by law enforcement or other state or local agency, to bring a civil action to recover unpaid vehicle recovery, impound and storage charges from a person who was operating a motor vehicle on a public highway in an illegal or negligent manner.

---

### SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

**Staff:** Kimberly Johnson (786-7472)

**Background:** Damages to the Highway or Public Property. Under current law, a person operating a vehicle or moving an object or conveyance on a public highway in an illegal or negligent manner is liable for any damage to a public highway, bridge, elevated structure, or public property that results. When the operator of the vehicle is not the owner of the vehicle, object, or conveyance, the owner and operator are jointly and severally liable for any such damage. The Department of Transportation or other state agency may recover the damages to the public highway, bridge, elevated structure, or public property in a civil

---

*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

action.

**Public Impounds.** Impounds, such as the taking and holding of a vehicle in legal custody without the consent of the owner, may only be performed by registered tow truck operators (RTTOs). A law enforcement officer or public official requesting a public impound shall provide a signed authorization for the impound at the time and place of the impound to the RTTO before the operator may proceed with the impound. The costs of removal and storage of vehicles when directed by the Washington State Patrol must be paid by the owner or driver of the vehicle and is a lien upon the vehicle until paid, unless the removal is determined to be invalid.

When a vehicle is impounded, an RTTO must send an impound notice to the legal owner, based on information received from law enforcement. After a vehicle is held in impound for more than 120 hours it is considered abandoned, and an RTTO must file an abandoned vehicle report (AVR) with the Department of Licensing (DOL). In response to the AVR, DOL provides information to the RTTO regarding the owner of the vehicle, and the RTTO must send, by certified mail, a notice of custody and sale to the owner.

If the vehicle remains unclaimed, the RTTO must conduct a sale at public auction. Vehicles may be redeemed by their legal owners any time before the start of the auction upon payment of towing and storage charges.

**Summary of Bill:** The bill as referred to committee not considered.

**Summary of Bill (Proposed Substitute):** A person who operates a vehicle on a public highway in an illegal or negligent manner is liable for vehicle recovery, impound, and storage charges for an RTTO dispatched by law enforcement or other state or local agency.

Costs for vehicle recovery, impound, and storage charges for any RTTO dispatched by law enforcement or other state or local agency, may be recovered in a civil action.

The amount recoverable in the civil action is the amount that has not been paid for the vehicle recovery, impound, and storage charges. Damages also include incident response and traffic control costs incurred by the RTTO.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** No.

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