
SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5484

State of Washington

69th Legislature

2025 Regular Session

By Senate Transportation (originally sponsored by Senators Chapman, King, and J. Wilson)

READ FIRST TIME 02/26/25.

1 AN ACT Relating to payments to tow truck operators for the
2 release of vehicles to indigent persons; amending RCW 46.55.115 and
3 46.55.120; adding a new section to chapter 46.55 RCW; and providing
4 an effective date.

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

6 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** A new section is added to chapter 46.55
7 RCW to read as follows:

8 (1) The department shall create a program to compensate
9 registered tow truck operators for private property impounds or
10 impounds performed at the direction of law enforcement to apply when
11 the owner of the vehicle is indigent, except when the vehicle has
12 been impounded after the vehicle owner has been arrested by a law
13 enforcement officer.

14 (2) An individual seeking the release of a vehicle under this
15 program must:

16 (a) Be the legal or registered owner of the vehicle;

17 (b) Be indigent;

18 (c) Either not have the ability to pay for the towing service or
19 when making such payment would be a severe hardship;

20 (d) Not have applied for the release of a vehicle under this
21 program more than once in the preceding year; and

1 (e) Fill out and certify the first part of the form described in
2 subsection (4)(a) of this section and submit it to the registered tow
3 truck operator.

4 (3) A registered tow truck operator may seek payment for private
5 property impounds or impounds ordered by a law enforcement agency
6 when the impound was not ordered following an arrest, for vehicles
7 owned by individuals meeting the requirements of subsection (2) of
8 this section. The registered tow truck operator applying for payment
9 must fill out the second part of the form described in subsection
10 (4)(b) of this section and must submit the completed form to the
11 department.

12 (4) The department shall provide a form to registered tow truck
13 operators that consists of two parts.

14 (a) The first part of the form is to be completed by individuals
15 seeking the release of a vehicle and must include a requirement that
16 individuals self-certify under penalty of perjury that they meet the
17 requirements of the program and acknowledge that they understand that
18 the department may verify or audit the information and that perjury
19 is a criminal offense.

20 (b)(i) The second part of the form is to be completed by
21 registered tow truck operators and must include a requirement that
22 registered tow truck operators self-certify under penalty of perjury
23 that they have verified that:

24 (A) The impound was a private property impound or ordered by a
25 law enforcement agency;

26 (B) The impound was not ordered following an arrest;

27 (C) The individual seeking the release of a vehicle is the owner
28 of the vehicle registered or titled with the department; and

29 (ii) The registered tow truck operators must acknowledge that
30 they understand that the department may verify or audit the
31 information and that perjury is a criminal offense.

32 (5) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this
33 specific purpose, the department shall disburse excess funds
34 deposited under RCW 46.55.130(2)(h) that are no longer subject to
35 payment for a valid claim under RCW 46.55.130(2)(h) in an amount
36 equal to the cost of the towing, storage, or other services incurred
37 by the registered tow truck operators during the course of the
38 private property impound or law enforcement directed impound to the
39 eligible registered tow truck operators following submission of the
40 form by the registered tow truck operator. The disbursements may not

1 total more than the applicable fees filed with the department under
2 RCW 46.55.063, inclusive of up to five days of storage. Eligibility
3 for payment under this section does not constitute an entitlement for
4 payment. If eligible applications for payment exceed the funds
5 available, the department must create and maintain a waitlist in the
6 order the forms are received pursuant to this section. The department
7 is not civilly or criminally liable and no penalty or cause of action
8 may be brought against it regarding the provision or lack of
9 provision of funds.

10 (6) The department shall provide an annual report to the
11 appropriate committees of the legislature by October 1st of each
12 year. The annual report must include the total number of law
13 enforcement directed tows not following an arrest, the number of
14 vehicles released under this program, the number of applicants who
15 received payment under this program, the total funds provided to
16 applicants, the number of applicants on the waitlist who did not
17 receive grants, the total amount of grants unpaid due to lack of
18 funds, and the number of ineligible applicants and the reasons for
19 ineligibility.

20 (7) A registered tow truck operator who releases the vehicle
21 under this section does not have a lien or deficiency claim on the
22 released vehicle.

23 (8) When an impounding tow truck operator sends notification to
24 the legal and registered owners of a vehicle regarding the
25 impoundment of it as required under RCW 46.55.110 and the vehicle may
26 be eligible under this program, the impounding tow truck operator
27 must include information in the notification about the program
28 established in this section for the release of vehicles to indigent
29 persons.

30 (9) The registered tow truck operator shall provide to each
31 person who seeks to redeem an impounded vehicle that may be eligible
32 under this program written notice, in a form and manner specified by
33 the department, of the release of vehicles to indigent individuals.
34 The notice must be accompanied by the form described in subsection
35 (4) of this section.

36 **Sec. 2.** RCW 46.55.115 and 1993 c 121 s 2 are each amended to
37 read as follows:

38 The Washington state patrol, under its authority to remove
39 vehicles from the highway, may remove the vehicles directly, through

1 towing operators appointed by the state patrol and called on a
2 rotational or other basis, through contracts with towing operators,
3 or by a combination of these methods. When removal is to be
4 accomplished through a towing operator on a noncontractual basis, the
5 state patrol may appoint any towing operator for this purpose upon
6 the application of the operator. Each appointment shall be contingent
7 upon the submission of an application to the state patrol and the
8 making of subsequent reports in such form and frequency and
9 compliance with such standards of equipment, performance, pricing,
10 and practices as may be required by rule of the state patrol.

11 An appointment may be rescinded by the state patrol upon evidence
12 that the appointed towing operator is not complying with the laws or
13 rules relating to the removal and storage of vehicles from the
14 highway. The state patrol may not rescind an appointment merely
15 because a registered tow truck operator negotiates a different rate
16 for voluntary, owner-requested towing than for involuntary towing
17 under this chapter. The costs of removal and storage of vehicles
18 under this section shall be paid by the owner or driver of the
19 vehicle and shall be a lien upon the vehicle until paid, unless the
20 removal is determined to be invalid or the registered tow truck
21 operator releases the vehicle under the program established in
22 section 1 of this act.

23 Rules promulgated under this section shall be binding only upon
24 those towing operators appointed by the state patrol for the purpose
25 of performing towing services at the request of the Washington state
26 patrol. Any person aggrieved by a decision of the state patrol made
27 under this section may appeal the decision under chapter 34.05 RCW.

28 **Sec. 3.** RCW 46.55.120 and 2017 c 152 s 1 are each amended to
29 read as follows:

30 (1)(a) Vehicles or other items of personal property registered or
31 titled with the department that are impounded by registered tow truck
32 operators pursuant to RCW 46.55.080, 46.55.085, 46.55.113, or
33 9A.88.140 may be redeemed only by the following persons or entities:

- 34 (i) The legal owner;
35 (ii) The registered owner;
36 (iii) A person authorized in writing by the registered owner;
37 (iv) The vehicle's insurer or a vendor working on behalf of the
38 vehicle's insurer;

1 (v) A third-party insurer that has a duty to repair or replace
2 the vehicle, has obtained consent from the registered owner or the
3 owner's agent to move the vehicle, and has documented that consent in
4 the insurer's claim file, or a vendor working on behalf of a third-
5 party insurer that has received such consent; provided, however, that
6 at all times the registered owner must be granted access to and may
7 reclaim possession of the vehicle. For the purposes of this
8 subsection, "owner's agent" means the legal owner of the vehicle, a
9 driver in possession of the vehicle with the registered owner's
10 permission, or an adult member of the registered owner's family;

11 (vi) A person who is determined and verified by the operator to
12 have the permission of the registered owner of the vehicle or other
13 item of personal property registered or titled with the department;

14 (vii) A person who has purchased a vehicle or item of personal
15 property registered or titled with the department from the registered
16 owner who produces proof of ownership or written authorization and
17 signs a receipt therefor; or

18 (viii) If (a)(i) through (vii) of this subsection do not apply, a
19 person, who is known to the registered or legal owner of a motorcycle
20 or moped, as each are defined in chapter 46.04 RCW, that was towed
21 from the scene of an accident, may redeem the motorcycle or moped as
22 a bailment in accordance with RCW 46.55.125 while the registered or
23 legal owner is admitted as a patient in a hospital due to the
24 accident.

25 (b) In addition, a vehicle impounded because the operator is in
26 violation of RCW 46.20.342(1)(c) shall not be released until a person
27 eligible to redeem it under (a) of this subsection satisfies the
28 requirements of (f) of this subsection, including paying all towing,
29 removal, and storage fees, notwithstanding the fact that the hold was
30 ordered by a government agency. If the department's records show that
31 the operator has been convicted of a violation of RCW 46.20.342 or a
32 similar local ordinance within the past five years, the vehicle may
33 be held for up to (~~thirty~~) 30 days at the written direction of the
34 agency ordering the vehicle impounded. A vehicle impounded because
35 the operator is arrested for a violation of RCW 46.20.342 may be
36 released only pursuant to a written order from the agency that
37 ordered the vehicle impounded or from the court having jurisdiction.
38 An agency shall issue a written order to release pursuant to a
39 provision of an applicable state agency rule or local ordinance
40 authorizing release on the basis of the following:

1 (i) Economic or personal hardship to the spouse of the operator,
2 taking into consideration public safety factors, including the
3 operator's criminal history and driving record; or

4 (ii) The owner of the vehicle was not the driver, the owner did
5 not know that the driver's license was suspended or revoked, and the
6 owner has not received a prior release under this subsection or RCW
7 46.55.113(3).

8 In order to avoid discriminatory application, other than for the
9 reasons for release set forth in (b)(i) and (ii) of this subsection,
10 an agency shall, under a provision of an applicable state agency rule
11 or local ordinance, deny release in all other circumstances without
12 discretion.

13 If a vehicle is impounded because the operator is in violation of
14 RCW 46.20.342(1) (a) or (b), the vehicle may be held for up to
15 ((~~thirty~~)) 30 days at the written direction of the agency ordering
16 the vehicle impounded. However, if the department's records show that
17 the operator has been convicted of a violation of RCW 46.20.342(1)
18 (a) or (b) or a similar local ordinance within the past five years,
19 the vehicle may be held at the written direction of the agency
20 ordering the vehicle impounded for up to ((~~sixty~~)) 60 days, and for
21 up to ((~~ninety~~)) 90 days if the operator has two or more such prior
22 offenses. If a vehicle is impounded because the operator is arrested
23 for a violation of RCW 46.20.342, the vehicle may not be released
24 until a person eligible to redeem it under (a) of this subsection
25 satisfies the requirements of (f) of this subsection, including
26 paying all towing, removal, and storage fees, notwithstanding the
27 fact that the hold was ordered by a government agency.

28 (c) If the vehicle is directed to be held for a suspended license
29 impound, a person who desires to redeem the vehicle at the end of the
30 period of impound shall within five days of the impound at the
31 request of the tow truck operator pay a security deposit to the tow
32 truck operator of not more than one-half of the applicable impound
33 storage rate for each day of the proposed suspended license impound.
34 The tow truck operator shall credit this amount against the final
35 bill for removal, towing, and storage upon redemption. The tow truck
36 operator may accept other sufficient security in lieu of the security
37 deposit. If the person desiring to redeem the vehicle does not pay
38 the security deposit or provide other security acceptable to the tow
39 truck operator, the tow truck operator may process and sell at
40 auction the vehicle as an abandoned vehicle within the normal time

1 limits set out in RCW 46.55.130(1). The security deposit required by
2 this section may be paid and must be accepted at any time up to
3 (~~twenty-four~~) 24 hours before the beginning of the auction to sell
4 the vehicle as abandoned. The registered owner is not eligible to
5 purchase the vehicle at the auction, and the tow truck operator shall
6 sell the vehicle to the highest bidder who is not the registered
7 owner.

8 (d) Notwithstanding (c) of this subsection, a rental car business
9 may immediately redeem a rental vehicle it owns by payment of the
10 costs of removal, towing, and storage, whereupon the vehicle will not
11 be held for a suspended license impound.

12 (e) Notwithstanding (c) of this subsection, a motor vehicle
13 dealer or lender with a perfected security interest in the vehicle
14 may redeem or lawfully repossess a vehicle immediately by payment of
15 the costs of removal, towing, and storage, whereupon the vehicle will
16 not be held for a suspended license impound. A motor vehicle dealer
17 or lender with a perfected security interest in the vehicle may not
18 knowingly and intentionally engage in collusion with a registered
19 owner to repossess and then return or resell a vehicle to the
20 registered owner in an attempt to avoid a suspended license impound.
21 However, this provision does not preclude a vehicle dealer or a
22 lender with a perfected security interest in the vehicle from
23 repossessing the vehicle and then selling, leasing, or otherwise
24 disposing of it in accordance with chapter 62A.9A RCW, including
25 providing redemption rights to the debtor under RCW 62A.9A-623. If
26 the debtor is the registered owner of the vehicle, the debtor's right
27 to redeem the vehicle under chapter 62A.9A RCW is conditioned upon
28 the debtor obtaining and providing proof from the impounding
29 authority or court having jurisdiction that any fines, penalties, and
30 forfeitures owed by the registered owner, as a result of the
31 suspended license impound, have been paid, and proof of the payment
32 must be tendered to the vehicle dealer or lender at the time the
33 debtor tenders all other obligations required to redeem the vehicle.
34 Vehicle dealers or lenders are not liable for damages if they rely in
35 good faith on an order from the impounding agency or a court in
36 releasing a vehicle held under a suspended license impound.

37 (f) The vehicle or other item of personal property registered or
38 titled with the department shall be released upon the presentation to
39 any person having custody of the vehicle of commercially reasonable
40 tender sufficient to cover the costs of towing, storage, or other

1 services rendered during the course of towing, removing, impounding,
2 or storing any such vehicle, with credit being given for the amount
3 of any security deposit paid under (c) of this subsection.
4 Alternatively, a vehicle must be released when the registered tow
5 truck operator completes the form described in section 1(4)(a) of
6 this act provided that the first part of the form is completed by an
7 individual seeking the release of a vehicle. In addition, if a
8 vehicle is impounded because the operator was arrested for a
9 violation of RCW 46.20.342 or 46.20.345 and was being operated by the
10 registered owner when it was impounded under local ordinance or
11 agency rule, it must not be released to any person until the
12 registered owner establishes with the agency that ordered the vehicle
13 impounded or the court having jurisdiction that any penalties, fines,
14 or forfeitures owed by him or her have been satisfied. Registered tow
15 truck operators are not liable for damages if they rely in good faith
16 on an order from the impounding agency or a court in releasing a
17 vehicle held under a suspended license impound. Commercially
18 reasonable tender shall include, without limitation, cash, major bank
19 credit cards issued by financial institutions, or personal checks
20 drawn on Washington state branches of financial institutions if
21 accompanied by two pieces of valid identification, one of which may
22 be required by the operator to have a photograph. If the towing firm
23 cannot determine through the customer's bank or a check verification
24 service that the presented check would be paid by the bank or
25 guaranteed by the service, the towing firm may refuse to accept the
26 check. Any person who stops payment on a personal check or credit
27 card, or does not make restitution within (~~ten~~) 10 days from the
28 date a check becomes insufficient due to lack of funds, to a towing
29 firm that has provided a service pursuant to this section or in any
30 other manner defrauds the towing firm in connection with services
31 rendered pursuant to this section shall be liable for damages in the
32 amount of twice the towing and storage fees, plus costs and
33 reasonable attorney's fees.

34 (2)(a) The registered tow truck operator shall give to each
35 person who seeks to redeem an impounded vehicle, or item of personal
36 property registered or titled with the department, written notice of
37 the right of redemption and opportunity for a hearing, which notice
38 shall be accompanied by a form to be used for requesting a hearing,
39 the name of the person or agency authorizing the impound, and a copy
40 of the towing and storage invoice. The registered tow truck operator

1 shall maintain a record evidenced by the redeeming person's signature
2 that such notification was provided.

3 (b) Any person seeking to redeem an impounded vehicle under this
4 section has a right to a hearing in the district or municipal court
5 for the jurisdiction in which the vehicle was impounded to contest
6 the validity of the impoundment or the amount of towing and storage
7 charges. The district court has jurisdiction to determine the issues
8 involving all impoundments including those authorized by the state or
9 its agents. The municipal court has jurisdiction to determine the
10 issues involving impoundments authorized by agents of the
11 municipality. Any request for a hearing shall be made in writing on
12 the form provided for that purpose and must be received by the
13 appropriate court within (~~ten~~) 10 days of the date the opportunity
14 was provided for in (a) of this subsection and more than five days
15 before the date of the auction. At the time of the filing of the
16 hearing request, the petitioner shall pay to the court clerk a filing
17 fee in the same amount required for the filing of a suit in district
18 court. If the hearing request is not received by the court within the
19 (~~ten-day~~) 10-day period, the right to a hearing is waived and the
20 registered owner is liable for any towing, storage, or other
21 impoundment charges permitted under this chapter. Upon receipt of a
22 timely hearing request, the court shall proceed to hear and determine
23 the validity of the impoundment.

24 (3) (a) The court, within five days after the request for a
25 hearing, shall notify the registered tow truck operator, the person
26 requesting the hearing if not the owner, the registered and legal
27 owners of the vehicle or other item of personal property registered
28 or titled with the department, and the person or agency authorizing
29 the impound in writing of the hearing date and time.

30 (b) At the hearing, the person or persons requesting the hearing
31 may produce any relevant evidence to show that the impoundment,
32 towing, or storage fees charged were not proper. The court may
33 consider a written report made under oath by the officer who
34 authorized the impoundment in lieu of the officer's personal
35 appearance at the hearing.

36 (c) At the conclusion of the hearing, the court shall determine
37 whether the impoundment was proper, whether the towing or storage
38 fees charged were in compliance with the posted rates, and who is
39 responsible for payment of the fees. The court may not adjust fees or
40 charges that are in compliance with the posted or contracted rates.

1 (d) If the impoundment is found proper, the impoundment, towing,
2 and storage fees as permitted under this chapter together with court
3 costs shall be assessed against the person or persons requesting the
4 hearing, unless the operator did not have a signed and valid
5 impoundment authorization from a private property owner or an
6 authorized agent.

7 (e) If the impoundment is determined to be in violation of this
8 chapter, then the registered and legal owners of the vehicle or other
9 item of personal property registered or titled with the department
10 shall bear no impoundment, towing, or storage fees, and any security
11 shall be returned or discharged as appropriate, and the person or
12 agency who authorized the impoundment shall be liable for any towing,
13 storage, or other impoundment fees permitted under this chapter. The
14 court shall enter judgment in favor of the registered tow truck
15 operator against the person or agency authorizing the impound for the
16 impoundment, towing, and storage fees paid. In addition, the court
17 shall enter judgment in favor of the registered and legal owners of
18 the vehicle, or other item of personal property registered or titled
19 with the department, for the amount of the filing fee required by law
20 for the impound hearing petition as well as reasonable damages for
21 loss of the use of the vehicle during the time the same was impounded
22 against the person or agency authorizing the impound. However, if an
23 impoundment arising from an alleged violation of RCW 46.20.342 or
24 46.20.345 is determined to be in violation of this chapter, then the
25 law enforcement officer directing the impoundment and the government
26 employing the officer are not liable for damages if the officer
27 relied in good faith and without gross negligence on the records of
28 the department in ascertaining that the operator of the vehicle had a
29 suspended or revoked driver's license. If any judgment entered is not
30 paid within (~~fifteen~~) 15 days of notice in writing of its entry,
31 the court shall award reasonable attorneys' fees and costs against
32 the defendant in any action to enforce the judgment. Notice of entry
33 of judgment may be made by registered or certified mail, and proof of
34 mailing may be made by affidavit of the party mailing the notice.
35 Notice of the entry of the judgment shall read essentially as
36 follows:

37 TO:

38 YOU ARE HEREBY NOTIFIED JUDGMENT was entered against you in
39 the Court located at in the sum of

1 \$., in an action entitled, Case
2 No. YOU ARE FURTHER NOTIFIED that attorneys fees and
3 costs will be awarded against you under RCW . . . if the
4 judgment is not paid within 15 days of the date of this
5 notice.

6 DATED this day of, (year) . . .

7 Signature
8 Typed name and address
9 of party mailing notice

10 (4) Any impounded abandoned vehicle or item of personal property
11 registered or titled with the department that is not redeemed within
12 (~~fifteen~~) 15 days of mailing of the notice of custody and sale as
13 required by RCW 46.55.110(3) shall be sold at public auction in
14 accordance with all the provisions and subject to all the conditions
15 of RCW 46.55.130. A vehicle or item of personal property registered
16 or titled with the department may be redeemed at any time before the
17 start of the auction either upon (~~payment~~):

- 18 (a) Payment of the applicable towing and storage fees; or
19 (b) The completion of the form specified in section 1 of this
20 act.

21 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** This act takes effect February 1, 2026.

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