

SENATE BILL REPORT

E2SSB 5700

As Passed Senate, February 13, 1996

Title: An act relating to motor vehicle license plates.

Brief Description: Replacing old license plates.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Transportation (originally sponsored by Senators Owen, Prince, Heavey, Wood, Kohl and Deccio).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 2/16/95, 3/2/95 [DPS]; 2/5/96 [DP2S].
Passed Senate, 2/13/96, 46-2.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: That Second Substitute Senate Bill No. 5700 be substituted therefor, and the second substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Owen, Chair; Heavey, Vice Chair; Goings, Morton, Prentice, Prince, Schow, Sellar, Thibaudeau and Wood.

Staff: Jennifer Joly (786-7305)

Background: When a license plate is lost, defaced, destroyed, or has become so illegible as to be difficult to distinguish, the registered vehicle owner is required to get new license plates. The application for new plates must be accompanied by the certificate of registration and a fee of \$3.50 per plate.

All replacement license plates issued after January 1, 1987, are on the blue mountain background design, which was originally developed for the Washington State Centennial Celebration. In addition to the mountain background plate, Washington State has three other officially designated license plate backgrounds: the white background with green symbols; the lemon yellow personalized plate background; and the red, white, and blue Congressional Medal of Honor background.

Additionally, restored license plates are available for collectors' vehicles that are more than 30 years old. Restored license plates are those which were originally issued during the vehicle's model year. Generally, restored license plates have white backgrounds with symbols of varying shades of green.

The Department of Licensing (DOL) is authorized to issue special license plates. DOL also has authority to set a fee of up to \$35 for special issuances, but does not have the ability to earmark the fees for specific, nonlicensing purposes.

Summary of Bill: Effective with vehicle registrations due or to become due on January 1, 2000, license plates must have a common background. Exemptions from the common

background license plate requirement are provided for: (1) commercial vehicles as defined in the vehicle inspection statute; (2) vehicles originally licensed before January 1, 1987, that are currently owned by the original licensee; (3) Congressional Medal of Honor license plate holders; and (4) horseless carriage license plate holders.

The Department of Licensing must estimate its costs, both direct and indirect, to create, design and procure the first minimum order of a special license plate series authorized. Upon DOL authorizing a special license plate series, the requesting party pays DOL the estimated costs associated with the first minimum order, and maintenance of a minimum inventory for additional sales. Payments from the requesting party are deposited in a special license plate account for production costs associated with the requested license plate series.

DOL must develop a form to facilitate the pre-sale of special license plates.

In addition to all fees and taxes required to be paid upon application, registration, and renewal registration of a motor vehicle, DOL may collect an additional fee from the holder of a special license plate. The additional fee is set by the requesting party. The State Treasurer, upon request of DOL, may create accounts for deposit of the additional fees. The proceeds from the fees are remitted to the requesting party on a quarterly basis. If the requesting party opts not to set an additional fee, the up to \$35 fee payable to the motor vehicle fund applies.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: January 1, 2000, except section 3 of the act which takes effect January 1, 1997.

Testimony For: Law enforcement would prefer a common license plate background for ease in identifying the vehicle's state of origin, especially at night. License plate replacement is warranted because plate reflectorization diminishes over time. Requiring replacement of license plates helps to deal with those who avoid vehicle registration; approximately 10 percent of drivers fail to re-register their vehicles annually, as required by law.

Testimony Against: The bill would require an appropriation to meet up-front production costs. Requiring plate replacements will increase the transaction times at DOL licensing service offices. Currently, 25 percent of personalized plate applicants want the yellow background, rather than the mountain background; this bill would prohibit their issuance and require those in circulation to be replaced.

Testified: Tim Erickson, WSP (pro); Tim Schellberg, WA Sheriffs & Police Chiefs (pro); Rick Jensen, WSP Troopers Assn. (pro); Mike Patrick, WA Council of Police Officers (pro); Jim Wadsworth, DOL (con); Janeen Wadsworth, Corrections Industries (neutral); Bill Fritz, 3M (pro).

House Amendment(s): The following provisions are removed: (1) requesting parties are permitted to collect an additional fee from the sales of special license plates to be earmarked for

nonlicensing purposes; and (2) requesting parties are required to prepay DOL's costs associated with the issuance of the special license plate series.