

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5700

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Transportation, February 5, 1995

Title: An act relating to motor vehicle license plates.

Brief Description: Requiring replacement of old license plates.

Sponsors: Senators Owen, Prince, Heavey, Wood, Kohl and Deccio.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 2/16/95, 3/2/95 [DPS]; 2/5/96 [DP2S].

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.

Summary of Second Substitute 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.

Second Substitute Bill Compared to Substitute Bill: The substitute bill required license plates issued before January 1, 1988, to be replaced upon annual license renewal beginning January 1, 1997. The second substitute requires that effective with vehicle registrations due or to become due on January 1, 2000, license plates must have a common background.

The substitute bill exempts personalized, amateur radio operator, and Pearl Harbor survivor special plates from replacement; the second substitute does not exempt them from the common background requirement.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: January 1, 2000.

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).