

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1963

As Passed House:
February 8, 2024

Title: An act relating to prohibiting license plate covers.

Brief Description: Prohibiting license plate covers.

Sponsors: Representatives Ramos, Fitzgibbon, Ryu, Berry, Duerr, Reed, Callan, Donaghy and Hackney.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 1/10/24, 1/17/24 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/8/24, 59-38.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires that license plates must be uncovered.
- Adds to the unlawful acts related to license plate display that it is unlawful to use a license plate cover.
- Requires that, until January 1, 2025, the penalty for the violation of using a license plate cover must be a written warning.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 22 members: Representatives Fey, Chair; Donaghy, Vice Chair; Paul, Vice Chair; Timmons, Vice Chair; Barkis, Ranking Minority Member; Low, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Berry, Bronoske, Chapman, Cortes, Dent, Doglio, Duerr, Entenman, Goehner, Hackney, Klicker, Mena, Nance, Ramel, Ramos and Wylie.

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.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Robertson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Orcutt, Volz and Walsh.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Hutchins, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Griffey and Schmidt.

Staff: Beth Redfield (786-7140).

Background:

Vehicles required to be registered with the Department of Licensing (DOL) must display license plates or decals assigned by the DOL.

License plate display requirements include that the license plate must be:

1. attached conspicuously at the front and rear of each vehicle if two license plates have been issued;
2. kept clean and be able to be plainly seen and read at all times; and
3. attached in a horizontal position at a distance of not more than 4 feet from the ground.

The Washington State Patrol may grant exceptions to the above license plate display requirements if the body construction of the vehicle makes compliance impossible.

It is an unlawful act to use a license plate holder, frame or other material that changes, alters, or makes a license plate or plates illegible.

Summary of Bill:

License plates must be kept uncovered to ensure the ability to plainly see and read the license plate.

The unlawful acts relating to display of license plates is broadened to include the use of a license plate cover. In addition, it is unlawful to use any material which conceals, obstructs, or distorts the legibility of the license plate.

Until January 1, 2025, the penalty for using a license plate cover may only be a written warning. The warning must include information about the law and applicable penalty.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The purpose of license plates is to have a vehicle that is always identifiable. You may have seen these plastic covers, can you read them? Many are tinted, cracked, faded, or are blurry and you are not able to read the license plate. One of the most important things is the safety of law enforcement officers, before pulling someone over they want to know who they are pulling over before they approach the vehicle. When you go through a toll booth and the toll camera cannot read your plate, you get free services that others pay for. When you go through a red light camera or a school zone speed zone camera, you do not get a ticket that other people have to pay for. You are getting out of paying your fees and accountability. The bill just says that we are not allowed to obstruct the license plate from being read by law enforcement when that vehicle needs to be identified. If you are doing the right thing, it does not matter to you. License plates are made to be indestructible and should last on your vehicle and they do not need additional protection. Not sure what license plate covers are accomplishing except obscuring the identity of the vehicle.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) It may seem to be a minor traffic violation, but for the Washington State Patrol (WSP) it is a matter of reducing fatality collisions, which is a matter of reducing speed. The radar device used by the WSP for speeding uses light detection and ranging (LIDAR) technology. With license plate covers, LIDAR cannot pick up those speeding violations. Have seen such an increase in speeding and aggressive driving, and these devices defeat our tools for enforcement.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Bill Ramos, prime sponsor.

(Other) Deion Glover, Washington State Patrol.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: Rose Feliciano.