
HOUSE BILL 1219

State of Washington 62nd Legislature 2011 Regular Session

By Representatives Rolfes and Appleton

Read first time 01/17/11. Referred to Committee on Transportation.

1 AN ACT Relating to license plates on the front of vehicles;
2 amending RCW 46.16A.200; creating a new section; and providing an
3 effective date.

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

5 **Sec. 1.** RCW 46.16A.200 and 2010 c 161 s 422 are each amended to
6 read as follows:

7 (1) **Design.** All license plates may be obtained by the director
8 from the metal working plant of a state correctional facility or from
9 any source in accordance with existing state of Washington purchasing
10 procedures. License plates:

11 (a) May vary in background, color, and design;

12 (b) Must be legible and clearly identifiable as a Washington state
13 license plate;

14 (c) Must designate the name of the state of Washington without
15 abbreviation;

16 (d) Must be treated with fully reflectorized materials designed to
17 increase visibility and legibility at night;

18 (e) Must be of a size and color and show the registration period as
19 determined by the director; and

1 (f) May display a symbol or artwork approved by the special license
2 plate review board and the legislature.

3 (2) **Exceptions to reflectorized materials.** License plates issued
4 before January 1, 1968, are not required to be treated with
5 reflectorized materials.

6 (3) **Dealer license plates.** License plates issued to a dealer must
7 contain an indication that the license plates have been issued to a
8 vehicle dealer.

9 (4)(a) **Furnished.** The director shall furnish to all persons making
10 satisfactory application for a vehicle registration:

11 (i) Two identical license plates each containing the license plate
12 number; (~~or~~)

13 (ii) One license plate if the vehicle is a trailer, semitrailer,
14 camper, moped, collector vehicle, horseless carriage, or motorcycle; or

15 (iii) One license plate if the registered owner of the vehicle
16 requests only a license plate for the rear of the vehicle for privacy
17 purposes, because the vehicle is a collector vehicle, or because the
18 design of the vehicle is not conducive for the placement of a license
19 plate on the front of the vehicle.

20 (b) The director may adopt types of license plates to be used as
21 long as the license plates are legible.

22 (5)(a) **Display.** License plates must be:

23 (i) Attached conspicuously at the front and rear of each vehicle if
24 two license plates have been issued;

25 (ii) Attached to the rear of the vehicle if one license plate has
26 been issued;

27 (iii) Kept clean and be able to be plainly seen and read at all
28 times; and

29 (iv) Attached in a horizontal position at a distance of not more
30 than four feet from the ground.

31 (b) The Washington state patrol may grant exceptions to this
32 subsection if the body construction of the vehicle makes compliance
33 with this section impossible.

34 (6) **Change of license classification.** A person who has altered a
35 vehicle that makes the current license plate or plates invalid for the
36 vehicle's use shall:

37 (a) Surrender the current license plate or plates to the

1 department, county auditor or other agent, or subagent appointed by the
2 director;

3 (b) Apply for a new license plate or plates; and

4 (c) Pay a change of classification fee required under RCW
5 46.17.310.

6 (7) **Unlawful acts.** It is unlawful to:

7 (a) Display a license plate or plates on the front or rear of any
8 vehicle that were not issued by the director for the vehicle;

9 (b) Display a license plate or plates on any vehicle that have been
10 changed, altered, or disfigured, or have become illegible;

11 (c) Use holders, frames, or other materials that change, alter, or
12 make a license plate or plates illegible. License plate frames may be
13 used on license plates only if the frames do not obscure license tabs
14 or identifying letters or numbers on the plates and the license plates
15 can be plainly seen and read at all times;

16 (d) Operate a vehicle unless a valid license plate or plates are
17 attached as required under this section;

18 (e) Transfer a license plate or plates issued under this chapter
19 between two or more vehicles without first making application to
20 transfer the license plates. A violation of this subsection (7)(e) is
21 a traffic infraction subject to a fine not to exceed five hundred
22 dollars. Any law enforcement agency that determines that a license
23 plate or plates have been transferred between two or more vehicles
24 shall confiscate the license plate or plates and return them to the
25 department for nullification along with full details of the reasons for
26 confiscation. Each vehicle identified in the transfer will be issued
27 a new license plate or plates upon application by the owner or owners
28 and the payment of full fees and taxes; or

29 (f) Fail, neglect, or refuse to endorse the registration
30 certificate and deliver the license plate or plates to the purchaser or
31 transferee of the vehicle, except as authorized under this section.

32 (8) **Transfer.** (a) Standard issue license plates follow the vehicle
33 when ownership of the vehicle changes unless the registered owner
34 wishes to retain the license plates and transfer them to a replacement
35 vehicle of the same use. A registered owner wishing to keep standard
36 issue license plates shall pay the license plate transfer fee required
37 under RCW 46.17.200(1)(c) when applying for license plate transfer.

1 (b) Special license plates may be treated in the same manner as
2 described in (a) of this subsection unless otherwise limited by law.

3 (c) License plates issued to the state or any county, city, town,
4 school district, or other political subdivision entitled to exemption
5 as provided by law may be treated in the same manner as described in
6 (a) of this subsection.

7 (9) **Replacement.** (a) An owner or the owner's authorized
8 representative shall apply for a replacement license plate or plates if
9 the current license plate or plates assigned to the vehicle have been
10 lost, defaced, or destroyed, or if one or both plates have become so
11 illegible or are in such a condition as to be difficult to distinguish.
12 An owner or the owner's authorized representative may apply for a
13 replacement license plate or plates at any time the owner chooses.

14 (b) The application for a replacement license plate or plates must:

15 (i) Be on a form furnished or approved by the director; and

16 (ii) Be accompanied by the fee required under RCW 46.17.200(1)(a).

17 (c) The department shall not require the payment of any fee to
18 replace a license plate or plates for vehicles owned, rented, or leased
19 by foreign countries or international bodies to which the United States
20 government is a signatory by treaty.

21 (10)(a) **Periodic replacement.** License plates must be replaced
22 periodically to ensure maximum legibility and reflectivity. The
23 department shall:

24 (i) Use empirical studies documenting the longevity of the
25 reflective materials used to make license plates;

26 (ii) Determine how frequently license plates must be replaced; and

27 (iii) Offer to owners the option of retaining the current license
28 plate number when obtaining replacement license plates for the fee
29 required in RCW 46.17.200(1)(b).

30 (b) Commercial motor vehicles with a gross weight in excess of
31 twenty-six thousand pounds are exempt from periodic license plate
32 replacement.

33 (11) **Periodic replacement--Exceptions.** The following license
34 plates are not required to be periodically replaced as required in
35 subsection (10) of this section:

36 (a) Horseless carriage license plates issued under RCW 46.18.255
37 before January 1, 1987;

1 (b) Congressional Medal of Honor license plates issued under RCW
2 46.18.230;

3 (c) License plates for commercial motor vehicles with a gross
4 weight greater than twenty-six thousand pounds.

5 (12) **Rules.** The department may adopt rules to implement this
6 section.

7 (13) **Tabs or emblems.** The director may issue tabs or emblems to be
8 attached to license plates or elsewhere on the vehicle to signify
9 initial registration and renewals. Renewals become effective when tabs
10 or emblems have been issued and properly displayed on license plates.

11 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** Section 1 of this act applies to vehicle
12 registrations that are due or become due on or after August 1, 2011.

13 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** This act takes effect August 1, 2011.

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