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**SENATE BILL 5735**

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**State of Washington 68th Legislature 2023 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Wagoner, J. Wilson, Saldaña, Muzzall, Warnick, Van De Wege, Hunt, Kuderer, Shewmake, Stanford, and Valdez

AN ACT Relating to notice for active duty military owners of impounded vehicles; and amending RCW 46.55.110 and 46.55.130.

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

**Sec.**  RCW 46.55.110 and 2019 c 401 s 2 are each amended to read as follows:

(1)(a) When an unauthorized vehicle is impounded, the impounding towing operator shall notify the legal and registered owners of the impoundment of the unauthorized vehicle and the owners of any other items of personal property registered or titled with the department. The notification shall be sent by first-class mail within ((~~twenty-four~~)) 24 hours after the impoundment to the last known registered and legal owners of the vehicle, and the owners of any other items of personal property registered or titled with the department, as provided by the law enforcement agency, and shall inform the owners of the identity of the person or agency authorizing the impound.

(b) The notification shall include the name of the impounding tow firm, its address, and telephone number. The notice shall also include the location, time of the impound, and by whose authority the vehicle was impounded. The notice shall also include the written notice of the right of redemption and opportunity for a hearing to contest the validity of the impoundment pursuant to RCW 46.55.120.

(c) The notification must include a notice that the registered tow truck operator will store personal belongings found in the vehicle at no cost if the vehicle's owner or agent is present to retrieve the personal belongings from the vehicle and sign a personal belongings storage request form before the date of auction. If the vehicle's owner calls a registered tow truck operator to inquire about the impounded vehicle, the registered tow truck operator shall inform the owner of the owner's ability to retrieve any personal belongings from the vehicle and to request the registered tow truck operator to store the personal belongings by signing a personal belongings storage request form before the date of auction. Registered tow truck operators shall store personal belongings at no cost for ((~~thirty~~)) 30 days from the date the personal belongings are removed from the vehicle by the owner and the vehicle's owner or agent has signed a personal belongings storage request form. Registered tow truck operators shall maintain a record of any signed personal belongings storage request form.

(2) In addition, if a suspended license impound has been ordered, the notice must state the length of the impound, the requirement of the posting of a security deposit to ensure payment of the costs of removal, towing, and storage, notification that if the security deposit is not posted the vehicle will immediately be processed and sold at auction as an abandoned vehicle, and the requirements set out in RCW 46.55.120(1)(c) regarding the payment of the costs of removal, towing, and storage as well as providing proof of satisfaction of any penalties, fines, or forfeitures before redemption. The notice must also state that the registered owner is ineligible to purchase the vehicle at the abandoned vehicle auction, if held.

(3)(a) In the case of an abandoned vehicle, or other item of personal property registered or titled with the department, within ((~~twenty-four~~)) 24 hours after receiving information on the legal and registered owners, which includes an active duty military status check, from the department through the abandoned vehicle report, the tow truck operator shall send by first-class mail a notice of custody and sale to the legal and registered owners and of the penalties for the traffic infraction littering—abandoned vehicle. The notice must include a notice that the registered tow truck operator will store personal belongings found in the vehicle at no cost if the vehicle's owner or agent is present to retrieve the personal belongings from the vehicle and sign a personal belongings storage request form before the date of auction. The tow truck operator shall obtain a certificate of mailing from the United States postal service when notice is mailed.

(b) If the legal or registered owner shows an active duty military status, as provided by the department, then the registered tow truck operator shall not sell the vehicle until criteria provided in the servicemembers civil relief act has been satisfied.

(4) If the date on which a notice required by subsection (3) of this section is to be mailed falls upon a Saturday, Sunday, or a postal holiday, the notice may be mailed on the next day that is neither a Saturday, Sunday, nor a postal holiday.

(5) No notices need be sent to the legal or registered owners of an impounded vehicle or other item of personal property registered or titled with the department, if the vehicle or personal property has been redeemed.

**Sec.**  RCW 46.55.130 and 2017 c 152 s 2 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) If, after the expiration of ((~~fifteen~~)) 15 days from the date of mailing of notice of custody and sale required in RCW 46.55.110(3) to the registered and legal owners, the vehicle remains unclaimed and has not been listed as a stolen vehicle, a suspended license impound has been directed but no commercially reasonable tender has been paid under RCW 46.55.120, or a person eligible to redeem under RCW 46.55.120(1)(a)(viii) has not come forth providing information that the registered or legal owner of a motorcycle or moped is an admitted patient in a hospital, the registered tow truck operator having custody of the vehicle shall conduct a sale of the vehicle at public auction after having first published a notice of the date, place, and time of the auction, and a method to contact the tow truck operator conducting the auction such as a telephone number, email address, or website, in a newspaper of general circulation in the county in which the vehicle is located not less than three days and no more than ((~~ten~~)) 10 days before the date of the auction. For the purposes of this section, a newspaper of general circulation may be a commercial, widely circulated, free, classified advertisement circular not affiliated with the registered tow truck operator and the notice may be listed in a classification delineating "auctions" or similar language designed to attract potential bidders to the auction. The notice shall contain a notification that a public viewing period will be available before the auction and the length of the viewing period. The auction shall be held during daylight hours of a normal business day. The viewing period must be one hour if ((~~twenty-five~~)) 25 or fewer vehicles are to be auctioned, two hours if more than ((~~twenty-five~~)) 25 and fewer than ((~~fifty~~)) 50 vehicles are to be auctioned, and three hours if ((~~fifty~~)) 50 or more vehicles are to be auctioned. If the registered tow truck operator is notified that the registered or legal owner of the moped or motorcycle is an admitted patient in the hospital as evidenced by a declaration on a form authorized by the department, the registered tow truck operator may delay the auction of the moped or motorcycle for a reasonable time in a good faith effort to provide additional time for the redemption of the vehicle.

(2) The following procedures are required in any public auction of such abandoned vehicles:

(a) The auction shall be held in such a manner that all persons present are given an equal time and opportunity to bid;

(b) All bidders must be present at the time of auction unless they have submitted to the registered tow truck operator, who may or may not choose to use the preauction bid method, a written bid on a specific vehicle. Written bids may be submitted up to five days before the auction and shall clearly state which vehicle is being bid upon, the amount of the bid, and who is submitting the bid;

(c) The open bid process, including all written bids, shall be used so that everyone knows the dollar value that must be exceeded;

(d) The highest two bids received shall be recorded in written form and shall include the name, address, and telephone number of each such bidder;

(e) In case the high bidder defaults, the next bidder has the right to purchase the vehicle for the amount of his or her bid;

(f) The successful bidder shall apply for title within ((~~fifteen~~)) 15 days;

(g) The registered tow truck operator shall post a copy of the auction procedure at the bidding site. If the bidding site is different from the licensed office location, the operator shall post a clearly visible sign at the office location that describes in detail where the auction will be held. At the bidding site a copy of the newspaper advertisement that lists the vehicles for sale shall be posted;

(h) All surplus moneys derived from the auction after satisfaction of the registered tow truck operator's lien shall be remitted within ((~~thirty~~)) 30 days to the department for deposit in the state motor vehicle fund. A report identifying the vehicles resulting in any surplus shall accompany the remitted funds. If the director subsequently receives a valid claim from the registered vehicle owner of record as determined by the department within one year from the date of the auction, the surplus moneys shall be remitted to such owner;

(i) If an operator receives no bid, or if the operator is the successful bidder at auction, the operator shall, within ((~~forty-five~~)) 45 days, sell the vehicle to a licensed vehicle wrecker, hulk hauler, or scrap processor by use of the abandoned vehicle report-affidavit of sale, or the operator shall apply for title to the vehicle.

(3) A tow truck operator may refuse to accept a bid at an abandoned vehicle auction under this section for any reason in the operator's posted operating procedures and for any of the following reasons: (a) The bidder is currently indebted to the operator; (b) the operator has knowledge that the bidder has previously abandoned vehicles purchased at auction; or (c) the bidder has purchased, at auction, more than four vehicles in the last calendar year without obtaining title to any or all of the vehicles. In no case may an operator hold a vehicle for longer than ((~~ninety~~)) 90 days without holding an auction on the vehicle, except for vehicles that are under a police or judicial hold or subject to the servicemembers civil relief act.

(4)(a) The accumulation of storage charges applied to the lien at auction under RCW 46.55.140 may not exceed ((~~fifteen~~)) 15 additional days from the date of receipt of the information by the operator from the department as provided by RCW 46.55.110(3) plus the storage charges accumulated prior to the receipt of the information. However, vehicles redeemed pursuant to RCW 46.55.120 prior to their sale at auction are subject to payment of all accumulated storage charges from the time of impoundment up to the time of redemption.

(b) The failure of the registered tow truck operator to comply with the time limits provided in this chapter limits the accumulation of storage charges to five days except where delay is unavoidable. Providing incorrect or incomplete identifying information to the department in the abandoned vehicle report shall be considered a failure to comply with these time limits if correct information is available. However, storage charges begin to accrue again on the date the correct and complete information is provided to the department by the registered tow truck operator.

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