FINAL BILL REPORT
SSB 5444

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Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Concerning special license plates and personalized license plates.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Transportation (originally sponsored by Senators Cortes, Chapman, Lovick, Nobles, Riccelli and Wilson, C.).

Senate Committee on Transportation
House Committee on Transportation

Background: The Department of Licensing (DOL) issues special vehicle license plates that may be used in lieu of standard plates. A governmental or nonprofit sponsoring organization seeking to sponsor a special plate either submits an application to DOL or requests legislation to create the special plate.

Under the DOL application method, the application packet must include the design of the special license plate, proof of 3500 signatures in support of the special license plate, and a start-up fee of $6,300. For special license plates enacted by the Legislature, a sponsoring organization must submit prepayment of all start-up costs to DOL within 30 days of enactment.

The sponsoring organization seeking to sponsor the special plate is required to reimburse DOL for the costs of establishing the new special plate. If the sponsoring organization is not able to meet the prepayment requirement, revenues generated from the sale of the special license plate are first used to pay off any costs associated with establishing the new plate. The sponsoring organization must also provide a proposed license plate design to DOL. The sponsoring organization must submit an annual financial report to DOL detailing actual revenues generated from the sale of the special license plate. The reports are reviewed, approved, and presented to the Joint Transportation Committee.

DOL collects special license plate fees, and for administrative expenses, deducts an amount not to exceed $12 for new plate issuance and $2 for renewal. After these expenses are paid, the state treasurer deposits the proceeds into the Motor Vehicle Account until DOL

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determines the start-up costs for a special license plate are paid. After that point, all remaining proceeds go to the sponsoring organization.

The Seattle Sounders FC special license plate is an existing special license plate where DOL has recouped the cost of implementing the special license plate. Proceeds from the sale of the plate after accounting for administrative expenses go to support the Washington State Mentors to increase the number of mentors within the state and to the Washington State Leadership Board (WSLB) to develop educational, veterans, international relations, and civics projects, and to recognize the outstanding public service of individuals or groups in the State of Washington.

The Seattle Seahawks special license plate is an existing special license plate where DOL has recouped the cost of implementing the special license plate. Proceeds from the sale of the plate after accounting for administrative expenses go to support the InvestED and the WSLB. InvestED helps students in need throughout Washington pay for items such as athletic fees, musical instruments, college entrance exams, and graduation expenses. The WSLB administers the Washington World Fellows Program, including the provision of fellowships.

The Seattle Mariners special license plate is an existing special license plate where DOL has recouped the cost of implementing the special license plate. Proceeds from the sale of the plate after accounting for administrative expenses goes to WSLB for the Sports Mentoring Program and the Washington World Fellows Program.

The Sports Mentoring Program was established by the Legislature in 2019, to enable eligible nonprofit community-based organizations to provide opportunities for underserved youth to join sports teams or otherwise participate in area sports. WSLB administers a competitive grant process for eligible organizations through the Sports Mentoring Program.

Under current law, for an additional fee, license plates displaying the standard background may be personalized using numbers or letters or both. The original registration is $52 for a personalized license plate, and the annual renewal is $42 for the plate. The personalized license plate revenue is deposited into the Limited Fish and Wildlife Account and the Wildlife Rehabilitation Account for specified purposes.

The Joint Transportation Committee (JTC) was created in 2005. The JTC operates as a bipartisan, bicameral legislative agency and conducts legislatively directed review and research of transportation issues and programs. The chairs of the House and Senate transportation committees serve as co-chairs of the JTC. All members of the Senate and House transportation committees are members of the JTC.

Summary: Bill Name. The legislation is specified as Bill's bill act.

Special License Plate Moratorium. Except for special license plates created under this

legislation, DOL is prohibited from issuing or accepting applications for any new special license plates until January 1, 2029. DOL must prominently display this special license plate moratorium on their website.

Special License Plate Workgroup. By October 1, 2025, DOL must convene a special license workgroup to conduct a comprehensive review of current provisions associated with special license plates. The requirements around the workgroup composition and the reporting to and involvement of the JTC are specified.

By November 15, 2027, DOL must provide a preliminary final report and give a presentation to the JTC detailing preliminary recommendations. Based on the direction and input provided by the JTC, DOL must then submit a final report with draft legislation to the transportation committees of the Legislature by January 1, 2028. The specific issues reviewed by the special license workgroup include:

- establishing more active review and oversight of special license plates by the JTC;
- increasing the signature and other application requirements;
- removing the ability to create nonreviewed special plates;
- modifying the current startup and other cost commitments;
- identifying metrics and methods for the discontinuation of low performing special license plates; and
- implementing other mechanisms to make the special license plate application, creation process, and use of funds more rigorous and accountable.

Joint Transportation Committee. By December 20, 2028, and at least every two years thereafter, the JTC must a hold a work session on the implementation of special license plate process improvements and other related issues.

Newly Authorized Special License Plates. Thirteen new special license plates are authorized. In addition to all fees and taxes required to be paid upon application for a vehicle registration, a fee of $40 is charged for the original issuance of one of the special license plates, and a $30 fee is charged for the renewal of one of the plates.

DOL will phase in the implementation of the following special license plates starting on November 1, 2025:

- Mount St. Helens with proceeds going to the Mount St. Helens Institute to promote education, stewardship, and science at Mount St. Helens;
- LeMay-America's Car Museum with proceeds going for education and job training related to automobiles;
- Smokey Bear with proceeds going for the Department of Natural Resources wildfire prevention programs;
- State Sport with proceeds going to the Seattle Metro Pickleball Association to be used exclusively for the construction and maintenance of dedicated pickleball courts;
- Keep Washington Evergreen with proceeds going to the Electric Vehicle Account for the support of electric charging stations throughout Washington;

- Historical Throwback with proceeds used for expanding and improving driver's education programs and activities; and
- Honey Bees and Pollinator with proceeds going to the Washington State Beekeepers Association to be used for research and educational activities and materials about honey bees and pollinators within Washington.

The remaining six special license plates authorized will only be implemented if 3500 signatures in support of the special license are submitted. The order of implementation of the special license plates is based on the 3500 signature submission date and DOL's ability to implement additional special license plates. The following special license plates are subject to these provisions:

- Donate Life with proceeds going to Life Center Northwest to build awareness for organ donation and organ donation registration;
- Firefighter Memorial with proceeds going to the Washington State Council of Firefighters to be used to benefit firefighters and their families in need;
- Nautical Northwest with proceeds going to support of historic resources of Whidbey Island's maritime communities;
- Naval Academy with proceeds going to the Veterans Stewardship Account to be used to benefit veterans or their families;
- Seattle Reign FC with proceeds going to the RAVE foundation to champion and empower girls, women, and gender diverse people, protect the Salish Sea, and advance equity for all, in play and life; and
- Working Forests with proceeds going to the Washington Tree Farm Program to support small forest landowners.

Other Special License Plate Changes. Proceeds from the sale of the Seattle Seahawks special license plate, after accounting for administrative expenses, are directed to the Seahawks charitable foundation and the WSLB. Proceeds from the sale of the Seattle Sounders FC special license plate, after accounting for administrative expenses, are directed to the RAVE Foundation, the official charitable arm of the Seattle Sounders FC, and the WSLB.

All proceeds from the Seattle Mariners special license plate, after accounting for administrative expenses, are directed to the Mariners Care Foundation rather than funding specified activities of the WSLB. The statutory authority for the Sports Mentoring Program is repealed.

Personalized License Plate Fee. The annual renewal fee for a personalized license plate is raised from $42 to $52.

Votes on Final Passage:

Senate	45	3	
House	96	2	(House amended)
Senate	47	1	(Senate concurred)

Effective: July 27, 2025
November 1, 2025 (Sections 3 through 24)