
SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 2114

State of Washington

69th Legislature

2026 Regular Session

By House Transportation (originally sponsored by Representatives Engell, Hill, Bernbaum, Abell, Low, Hall, Simmons, Barkis, Barnard, Zahn, Dufault, and Graham)

READ FIRST TIME 02/09/26.

1 AN ACT Relating to defective license plates issued by the
2 department of licensing; amending RCW 46.17.200 and 46.16A.200;
3 adding a new section to chapter 46.17 RCW; creating new sections; and
4 providing an effective date.

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

6 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The department of licensing sells license
7 plates, and sometimes those license plates weather quickly and become
8 illegible. The manufacturer has indicated the license plates will be
9 useable for a number of years, so when the plates delaminate,
10 purchasers are justifiably upset when the replacement for the
11 defective license plate requires payment of fees and taxes. The
12 department of licensing cannot ignore statutory requirements to
13 collect fees and taxes associated with replacement plates. The
14 legislature intends to improve the department of licensing's ability
15 to provide customer service when a license plate fails to last the
16 expected life span by making clear that fees and taxes that were
17 collected when a license plate is initially purchased do not apply
18 when a defective license plate is being replaced.

19 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 46.17
20 RCW to read as follows:

1 (1) A person who requests a replacement license plate for a
2 license plate that is defective may receive a replacement set of
3 license plates:

4 (a) Free of charge, if the request is made on or before the last
5 day of the 24th month from the date of issuance of the defective
6 plate;

7 (b) With respect to vehicles not otherwise exempt from
8 registration fees: For the amounts in this subsection (1)(b)(i)
9 through (v), at the department's discretion, and if the request is
10 made after the last day of the 24th month and on or before the last
11 day of the 60th month from the date of issuance of the defective
12 plate:

13 (i) The actual cost of the license plate or set of plates;

14 (ii) The filing fee in accordance with RCW 46.17.005;

15 (iii) The license service fee in accordance with RCW 46.17.025;

16 (iv) The service fee in accordance with RCW 46.17.040(1)(b); and

17 (v) The actual cost of the vehicle registration tabs to be
18 affixed to the plates.

19 (2) A license plate is considered defective for the purposes of
20 this section if the plate is no longer functional. Lack of
21 functionality is indicated when the numbers are no longer legible,
22 the paint is peeling or bubbling, or when the plate materials have
23 otherwise degraded.

24 (3) The department may require the defective plate to be
25 submitted with the request for replacement license plates in order
26 for the person to qualify for reduced charges under subsection (1) of
27 this section.

28 (4) The department is not required to provide a replacement
29 license plate at reduced charges in accordance with subsection (1) of
30 this section if:

31 (a) The license plate has been tampered with by manual means or
32 was damaged in a vehicle collision with another vehicle, building, or
33 object;

34 (b) The defective license plate is associated with a vehicle
35 registered as stolen and the person requesting the plate is not the
36 owner or registered person of the vehicle;

37 (c) The person has already received a replacement plate within
38 the preceding five years;

39 (d) The person has applied for or is submitting an application to
40 transfer the license plate to a different vehicle; or

1 (e) The department determines the license plate is not associated
2 with a valid registration for the specific vehicle.

3 (5) A person with one defective license plate is eligible to
4 receive a replacement set of license plates under the terms of this
5 section unless only one license plate is required by law.

6 **Sec. 3.** RCW 46.17.200 and 2022 c 182 s 202 are each amended to
7 read as follows:

8 (1) In addition to all other fees and taxes required by law, the
9 department, county auditor or other agent, or subagent appointed by
10 the director shall charge:

11 (a) The following license plate fees for each license plate,
12 unless the owner or type of vehicle is exempt from payment or, with
13 respect to a replacement plate, the owner is replacing a defective
14 plate in accordance with section 2 of this act:

FEE TYPE	FEE	DISTRIBUTION
Original issue	\$50.00	RCW 46.68.070
Reflectivity	\$2.00	RCW 46.68.070
Replacement	\$30.00	RCW 46.68.070
Original issue, motorcycle	\$20.00	RCW 46.68.070
Replacement, motorcycle	\$12.00	RCW 46.68.070
Original issue, moped	\$1.50	RCW 46.68.070

25 (b) A license plate retention fee, as required under RCW
26 46.16A.200(9)(a), of \$20 if the owner wishes to retain the current
27 license plate number upon license plate replacement, unless the owner
28 or type of vehicle is exempt from payment. The \$20 fee must be
29 deposited in the multimodal transportation account created in RCW
30 47.66.070.

31 (c) A \$10 license plate transfer fee, as required under RCW
32 46.16A.200(8)(a), when transferring standard issue license plates
33 from one vehicle to another, unless the owner or type of vehicle is
34 exempt from payment. The \$10 license plate transfer fee must be
35 deposited in the motor vehicle fund created in RCW 46.68.070.

1 (d) Former prisoner of war license plates, as described in RCW
2 46.18.235, may be transferred to a replacement vehicle upon payment
3 of a \$5 license plate fee, in addition to any other fee required by
4 law.

5 (2) The department may, upon request, provide license plates that
6 have been used and returned to the department to individuals for
7 nonvehicular use. The department may charge a fee of up to \$5 per
8 license plate to cover costs or recovery for postage and handling.
9 The department may waive the fee for license plates used in
10 educational projects and may, by rule, provide standards for the fee
11 waiver and restrictions on the number of license plates provided to
12 any one person. The fee must be deposited in the motor vehicle fund
13 created in RCW 46.68.070.

14 (3) \$40 of the original issue license plate fee imposed under
15 subsection (1)(a) of this section and \$16 of the original issue
16 motorcycle license plate fee imposed under subsection (1)(a) of this
17 section must be deposited in the move ahead WA account created in RCW
18 46.68.510.

19 (4) \$20 of the replacement license plate fee imposed under
20 subsection (1)(a) of this section and \$8 of the replacement
21 motorcycle license plate fee imposed under subsection (1)(a) of this
22 section must be deposited in the move ahead WA account created in RCW
23 46.68.510.

24 **Sec. 4.** RCW 46.16A.200 and 2024 c 84 s 1 are each amended to
25 read as follows:

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

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

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

33 (c) Must designate the name of the state of Washington without
34 abbreviation;

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

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

1 (f) Before July 1, 2010, may display a symbol or artwork approved
2 by the former special license plate review board and the legislature.
3 Beginning July 1, 2010, special license plate series approved by the
4 department and enacted into law by the legislature may display a
5 symbol or artwork approved by the department.

6 (2) **Exceptions to reflectorized materials.** License plates issued
7 before January 1, 1968, are not required to be treated with
8 reflectorized materials.

9 (3) **Dealer license plates.** License plates issued to a dealer must
10 contain an indication that the license plates have been issued to a
11 vehicle dealer.

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

14 (i) Two identical license plates each containing the license
15 plate number; or

16 (ii) One license plate if the vehicle is a trailer, semitrailer,
17 camper, moped, collector vehicle, horseless carriage, or motorcycle.

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

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

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

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

25 (iii) Except as provided in subsection (7)(c)(ii) of this
26 section, kept clean and uncovered and be able to be plainly seen and
27 read at all times unless an exception in (b) of this subsection
28 applies; and

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

31 (b)(i) 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 (ii) If the applicable requirements of (b)(iii) of this
35 subsection are met, the display of a single license plate properly
36 attached to a vehicle that has two license plates properly attached
37 in accordance with (a)(i) of this subsection may be temporarily
38 obstructed by one or more of the following devices or by the cargo
39 the device is carrying:

40 (A) A trailer hitch;

1 (B) A wheelchair lift or wheelchair carrier;

2 (C) A trailer being towed by the vehicle, provided the trailer
3 meets any applicable trailer license plate requirements under this
4 chapter; or

5 (D) A bicycle rack, ski rack, or luggage rack.

6 (iii) The obstruction of a single license plate under (b)(ii) or
7 (b)(iv) of this subsection is only authorized if the following
8 requirements are met:

9 (A) The device is installed according to manufacturer
10 specifications or generally accepted installation practices; and

11 (B) The device or cargo the device is carrying does not prevent
12 the license plate from being read from one or more accessible viewing
13 angles when the vehicle is parked, except if the device is a trailer
14 that meets the trailer license plate requirements under this chapter.

15 (iv) If the applicable requirements of (b)(iii) of this
16 subsection are met, the display of a single license plate attached to
17 a trailer in accordance with (a)(ii) of this subsection and meeting
18 any applicable trailer license plate requirements under this chapter
19 may be obstructed by a device for transporting a forklift used for
20 product delivery purposes. For purposes of license plate visibility,
21 the single trailer license plate obstructed by a device for carrying
22 a forklift may be relocated on the trailer or the towing vehicle to a
23 position that is more than four feet from the ground.

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

27 (a) Surrender the current license plate or plates to the
28 department, county auditor or other agent, or subagent appointed by
29 the director;

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

31 (c) Pay a change of classification fee required under RCW
32 46.17.310.

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

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

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

38 (c)(i) Except as provided in (c)(ii) of this subsection, use
39 license plate holders, frames, covers, or other materials that

1 conceal, obstruct, distort, change, alter, or make a license plate or
2 plates illegible;

3 (ii) License plate frames may be used on license plates only if
4 the frames do not obscure license tabs or identifying letters or
5 numbers on the plates and the license plates can be plainly seen and
6 read at all times;

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

9 (e) Transfer a license plate or plates issued under this chapter
10 between two or more vehicles without first making application to
11 transfer the license plates. A violation of this subsection (7)(e) is
12 a traffic infraction subject to a fine not to exceed \$500. Any law
13 enforcement agency that determines that a license plate or plates
14 have been transferred between two or more vehicles shall confiscate
15 the license plate or plates and return them to the department for
16 nullification along with full details of the reasons for
17 confiscation. Each vehicle identified in the transfer will be issued
18 a new license plate or plates upon application by the owner or owners
19 and the payment of full fees and taxes; or

20 (f) Fail, neglect, or refuse to endorse the registration
21 certificate, except as authorized under this section.

22 (8) **Transfer.** (a) Standard issue license plates must be replaced
23 when ownership of the vehicle changes, pursuant to subsection
24 (9)(a)(i) of this section, but the registered owner may retain the
25 license plates and transfer them to a replacement vehicle of the same
26 use. In addition to all other taxes and fees due upon change in
27 ownership, a registered owner wishing to keep standard issue license
28 plates shall pay the license plate transfer fee required under RCW
29 46.17.200(1)(c) when applying for license plate transfer.

30 (b) Special license plates and personalized license plates may be
31 treated in the same manner as described in (a) of this subsection
32 unless otherwise limited by law.

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

37 (d) License plate replacement is not required when a change in
38 vehicle ownership is the result of one or more of the following
39 circumstances:

1 (i) When adding a lienholder to the certificate of title or
2 removing a lienholder from the certificate of title;

3 (ii) When a vehicle is transferred from one spouse or registered
4 domestic partner to another;

5 (iii) When removing a deceased spouse or registered domestic
6 partner from the certificate of title;

7 (iv) When a vehicle is transferred by gift or inheritance to one
8 or more members of the registered owner's immediate family;

9 (v) When a vehicle is transferred into or out of a trust in which
10 the registered owner or one or more immediate family members of the
11 registered owner is the beneficiary;

12 (vi) When a leaseholder buys out the leased vehicle; or

13 (vii) When a person changes his or her name.

14 (9) **Replacement.** (a) Except as provided in subsection (8)(a) of
15 this section, an owner or the owner's authorized representative must
16 apply for a replacement license plate or plates: (i) When taking
17 ownership of the vehicle; (ii) if the current license plate or plates
18 assigned to the vehicle have been lost, defaced, or destroyed; or
19 (iii) if one or both plates have become so illegible or are in such a
20 condition as to be difficult to distinguish. An owner or the owner's
21 authorized representative may apply for a replacement license plate
22 or plates at any time the owner chooses. The department shall offer
23 to owners the option of retaining the current license plate number
24 when obtaining replacement license plates for the fee required in RCW
25 46.17.200(1)(b).

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

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

29 (ii) Be accompanied by the fee required under RCW
30 46.17.200(1)(a), unless the license plate for which a replacement is
31 sought is defective and qualifies for a reduced fee pursuant to
32 section 2 of this act.

33 (c) When a vehicle is sold to a vehicle dealer for resale, the
34 application for a replacement plate or plates need not be made until
35 the vehicle is sold by the vehicle dealer.

36 (d) The department shall not require the payment of any fee to
37 replace a license plate or plates for vehicles owned, rented, or
38 leased by foreign countries or international bodies to which the
39 United States government is a signatory by treaty.

1 (10) **Replacement—Exceptions.** The following license plates are not
2 required to be replaced as required in subsection (9) of this
3 section:

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

6 (b) Medal of Honor license plates issued under RCW 46.18.230;

7 (c) License plates for commercial motor vehicles with a gross
8 weight greater than 26,000 pounds.

9 (11) **Rules.** The department may adopt rules to implement this
10 section.

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

15 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 5.** Section 2 of this act is exempt from the
16 rule of strict construction, and shall be liberally construed to give
17 full effect to the objective and purpose of replacing defective
18 license plates in a manner that is consistent with fairness to the
19 person that purchased the license plates.

20 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 6.** This act takes effect January 1, 2027.

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