
HOUSE BILL 2114

State of Washington

69th Legislature

2026 Regular Session

By Representatives Engell, Hill, Bernbaum, Abell, Low, Hall, Simmons, Barkis, Barnard, Zahn, Dufault, and Graham

Prefiled 12/08/25. Read first time 01/12/26. Referred to Committee on Transportation.

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 has been issued a license plate that is
2 defective may request replacement license plates for use on the same
3 vehicle within five years of the issuance date. The defect must
4 render the license plate not functional such as, but not limited to,
5 the numbers are no longer legible or the paint is peeling or
6 bubbling. The department may require the defective plate to be
7 removed from the vehicle and submitted with the request for
8 replacement license plates.

9 (2) If the request for replacement occurs on or before the last
10 day of the 24th month from the date of the license plate issuance, no
11 fees or taxes are due. If the request for a replacement license plate
12 occurs after the last day of the 24th month from the date of issuance
13 through and including the five year anniversary of the date of the
14 issuance, the department may collect the cost of the license plate or
15 set of license plates, the filing fee in accordance with RCW
16 46.17.005, the license service fee in accordance with RCW 46.17.025,
17 the service fee in accordance with RCW 46.17.040(1)(b), and the cost
18 of the tabs depicting the month and year of registration, unless the
19 transaction would otherwise be exempt from such fees, then the
20 exemption still applies.

21 (3) The department is not required to provide a replacement
22 license plate in accordance with subsection (2) of this section in
23 the following circumstances:

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

27 (b) The defective license plate was associated with a vehicle
28 registered as stolen and the person requesting the plate is not the
29 owner or registered person of the vehicle;

30 (c) The person has already received a replacement for the license
31 plate within five years;

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

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

36 (4) A person with one defective license plate is eligible to
37 receive a replacement set of license plates unless only one license
38 plate is required by law.

1 (5) For purposes of this section "license plate" includes all
2 license plates that are not temporary plates issued to vehicle owners
3 by the department or by an authorized entity for vehicle licensing.

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

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

9 (a) The following license plate fees for each license plate,
10 unless the owner or type of vehicle is exempt from payment or a
11 defective plate is being replaced in accordance with section 2 of
12 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

23 (b) A license plate retention fee, as required under RCW
24 46.16A.200(9)(a), of \$20 if the owner wishes to retain the current
25 license plate number upon license plate replacement, unless the owner
26 or type of vehicle is exempt from payment. The \$20 fee must be
27 deposited in the multimodal transportation account created in RCW
28 47.66.070.

29 (c) A \$10 license plate transfer fee, as required under RCW
30 46.16A.200(8)(a), when transferring standard issue license plates
31 from one vehicle to another, unless the owner or type of vehicle is
32 exempt from payment. The \$10 license plate transfer fee must be
33 deposited in the motor vehicle fund created in RCW 46.68.070.

34 (d) Former prisoner of war license plates, as described in RCW
35 46.18.235, may be transferred to a replacement vehicle upon payment

1 of a \$5 license plate fee, in addition to any other fee required by
2 law.

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

12 (3) \$40 of the original issue license plate fee imposed under
13 subsection (1)(a) of this section and \$16 of the original issue
14 motorcycle license plate fee imposed under subsection (1)(a) of this
15 section must be deposited in the move ahead WA account created in RCW
16 46.68.510.

17 (4) \$20 of the replacement license plate fee imposed under
18 subsection (1)(a) of this section and \$8 of the replacement
19 motorcycle license plate fee imposed under subsection (1)(a) of this
20 section must be deposited in the move ahead WA account created in RCW
21 46.68.510.

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

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

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

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

31 (c) Must designate the name of the state of Washington without
32 abbreviation;

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

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

37 (f) Before July 1, 2010, may display a symbol or artwork approved
38 by the former special license plate review board and the legislature.
39 Beginning July 1, 2010, special license plate series approved by the

1 department and enacted into law by the legislature may display a
2 symbol or artwork approved by the department.

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
10 making satisfactory application for a vehicle registration:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

28 (b)(i) The Washington state patrol may grant exceptions to this
29 subsection if the body construction of the vehicle makes compliance
30 with this section impossible.

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

37 (A) A trailer hitch;

38 (B) A wheelchair lift or wheelchair carrier;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

37 (c)(i) Except as provided in (c)(ii) of this subsection, use
38 license plate holders, frames, covers, or other materials that
39 conceal, obstruct, distort, change, alter, or make a license plate or
40 plates illegible;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

10 (vi) When a leaseholder buys out the leased vehicle; or
11 (vii) When a person changes his or her name.

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

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

26 (i) Be on a form furnished or approved by the director; and
27 (ii) Be accompanied by the fee required under RCW 46.17.200(1)(a)
28 unless it is a defective license plate replacement issued pursuant to
29 section 2 of this act.

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

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

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

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

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

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

6 (11) **Rules.** The department may adopt rules to implement this
7 section.

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

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

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

--- END ---