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**SENATE BILL 5440**

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**State of Washington**

**69th Legislature**

**2025 Regular Session**

**By** Senators MacEwen, Chapman, and Gildon

Read first time 01/22/25. Referred to Committee on Transportation.

1 AN ACT Relating to single license plates for certain vehicles;  
2 amending RCW 46.16A.200 and 46.17.200; and creating a new section.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

19 (f) Before July 1, 2010, may display a symbol or artwork approved  
20 by the former special license plate review board and the legislature.  
21 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 vehicle registered  
14 under RCW 46.17.350(1) (j) or (n) or a vehicle registered under RCW  
15 46.17.355 that is 12,000 pounds or less gross vehicle weight. A  
16 person who obtains one license plate under this subsection must pay  
17 all applicable fees as if the vehicle had been issued two license  
18 plates; or

19 (iii) One license plate if the vehicle is a trailer, semitrailer,  
20 camper, moped, collector vehicle, horseless carriage, or motorcycle.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

37 (ii) If the applicable requirements of (b)(iii) of this  
38 subsection are met, the display of a single license plate properly  
39 attached to a vehicle that has two license plates properly attached  
40 in accordance with (a)(i) of this subsection may be temporarily

1 obstructed by one or more of the following devices or by the cargo  
2 the device is carrying:

- 3 (A) A trailer hitch;
- 4 (B) A wheelchair lift or wheelchair carrier;
- 5 (C) A trailer being towed by the vehicle, provided the trailer  
6 meets any applicable trailer license plate requirements under this  
7 chapter; or
- 8 (D) A bicycle rack, ski rack, or luggage rack.

9 (iii) The obstruction of a single license plate under (b)(ii) or  
10 ~~((b))~~(iv) of this subsection is only authorized if the following  
11 requirements are met:

- 12 (A) The device is installed according to manufacturer  
13 specifications or generally accepted installation practices; and
- 14 (B) The device or cargo the device is carrying does not prevent  
15 the license plate from being read from one or more accessible viewing  
16 angles when the vehicle is parked, except if the device is a trailer  
17 that meets the trailer license plate requirements under this chapter.

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

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

- 30 (a) Surrender the current license plate or plates to the  
31 department, county auditor or other agent, or subagent appointed by  
32 the director;
- 33 (b) Apply for a new license plate or plates; and
- 34 (c) Pay a change of classification fee required under RCW  
35 46.17.310.

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

- 37 (a) Display a license plate or plates on the front or rear of any  
38 vehicle that were not issued by the director for the vehicle;
- 39 (b) Display a license plate or plates on any vehicle that have  
40 been changed, altered, or disfigured, or have become illegible;

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

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

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

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

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

24 (8) **Transfer.** (a) Standard issue license plates must be replaced  
25 when ownership of the vehicle changes, pursuant to subsection  
26 (9)(a)(i) of this section, but the registered owner may retain the  
27 license plates and transfer them to a replacement vehicle of the same  
28 use. In addition to all other taxes and fees due upon change in  
29 ownership, a registered owner wishing to keep standard issue license  
30 plates shall pay the license plate transfer fee required under RCW  
31 46.17.200(1)(c) when applying for license plate transfer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

17 (9) **Replacement.** (a) Except as provided in subsection (8)(a) of  
18 this section, an owner or the owner's authorized representative must  
19 apply for a replacement license plate or plates: (i) When taking  
20 ownership of the vehicle; (ii) if the current license plate or plates  
21 assigned to the vehicle have been lost, defaced, or destroyed; or  
22 (iii) if one or both plates have become so illegible or are in such a  
23 condition as to be difficult to distinguish. An owner or the owner's  
24 authorized representative may apply for a replacement license plate  
25 or plates at any time the owner chooses. The department shall offer  
26 to owners the option of retaining the current license plate number  
27 when obtaining replacement license plates for the fee required in RCW  
28 46.17.200(1)(b).

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

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

32 (ii) Be accompanied by the fee required under RCW  
33 46.17.200(1)(a).

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

37 (d) The department shall not require the payment of any fee to  
38 replace a license plate or plates for vehicles owned, rented, or  
39 leased by foreign countries or international bodies to which the  
40 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 **Sec. 2.** RCW 46.17.200 and 2022 c 182 s 202 are each amended to  
16 read as follows:

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

20 (a) (~~The~~) Except as provided in RCW 46.16A.200(4)(a)(ii), the  
21 following license plate fees for each license plate, unless the owner  
22 or type of vehicle is exempt from payment:

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

33 (b) A license plate retention fee, as required under RCW  
34 46.16A.200(9)(a), of \$20 if the owner wishes to retain the current  
35 license plate number upon license plate replacement, unless the owner  
36 or type of vehicle is exempt from payment. The \$20 fee must be

1 deposited in the multimodal transportation account created in RCW  
2 47.66.070.

3 (c) A \$10 license plate transfer fee, as required under RCW  
4 46.16A.200(8)(a), when transferring standard issue license plates  
5 from one vehicle to another, unless the owner or type of vehicle is  
6 exempt from payment. The \$10 license plate transfer fee must be  
7 deposited in the motor vehicle fund created in RCW 46.68.070.

8 (d) Former prisoner of war license plates, as described in RCW  
9 46.18.235, may be transferred to a replacement vehicle upon payment  
10 of a \$5 license plate fee, in addition to any other fee required by  
11 law.

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

21 (3) \$40 of the original issue license plate fee imposed under  
22 subsection (1)(a) of this section and \$16 of the original issue  
23 motorcycle license plate fee imposed under subsection (1)(a) of this  
24 section must be deposited in the move ahead WA account created in RCW  
25 46.68.510.

26 (4) \$20 of the replacement license plate fee imposed under  
27 subsection (1)(a) of this section and \$8 of the replacement  
28 motorcycle license plate fee imposed under subsection (1)(a) of this  
29 section must be deposited in the move ahead WA account created in RCW  
30 46.68.510.

31 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** This act applies to vehicle registrations  
32 that are due or become due on or after January 1, 2026.

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