

CERTIFICATION OF ENROLLMENT

SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 2114

Chapter 172, Laws of 2026

69th Legislature
2026 Regular Session

DEFECTIVE LICENSE PLATE REPLACEMENT

EFFECTIVE DATE: January 1, 2027

Passed by the House March 12, 2026
Yeas 96 Nays 0

LAURIE JINKINS

**Speaker of the House of
Representatives**

Passed by the Senate March 4, 2026
Yeas 48 Nays 0

DENNY HECK

President of the Senate

Approved March 24, 2026 10:21 AM

BOB FERGUSON

Governor of the State of Washington

CERTIFICATE

I, Bernard Dean, Chief Clerk of the House of Representatives of the State of Washington, do hereby certify that the attached is **SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 2114** as passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate on the dates hereon set forth.

BERNARD DEAN

Chief Clerk

FILED

March 25, 2026

**Secretary of State
State of Washington**

SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 2114

AS AMENDED BY THE SENATE

Passed Legislature - 2026 Regular Session

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 46.16A.200; adding a new
3 section to chapter 46.17 RCW; creating new sections; and providing an
4 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) Completely free of charge without being subject to the
5 following fees, if the request is made on or before the last day of
6 the 24th month from the date of issuance of the defective plate:

7 (i) The license plate and other fees in accordance with RCW
8 46.17.200;

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

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

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

12 (v) The special license plate fee in accordance with RCW
13 46.17.220;

14 (vi) The personalized license plate fee in accordance with RCW
15 46.17.210;

16 (b) Completely free of charge without being subject to the fees
17 specified (a) of this subsection, if the request is made after the
18 last day of the 24th month and on or before the last day of the 60th
19 month from the date of issuance of the defective plate, and if the
20 defective plate meets the criteria as established by the department
21 in rule. Based on the criteria as established by the department in
22 rule, any of the fees specified in (a) of this subsection may be
23 imposed, at the department's discretion, depending on the specific
24 circumstances of the need for license plate replacement.

25 (2) A license plate is considered defective for the purposes of
26 this section if the plate is no longer functional. Lack of
27 functionality is indicated when the numbers are no longer legible,
28 the paint is peeling or bubbling, or when the plate materials have
29 otherwise degraded.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

13 **Sec. 3.** RCW 46.16A.200 and 2024 c 84 s 1 are each amended to
14 read as follows:

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

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

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

22 (c) Must designate the name of the state of Washington without
23 abbreviation;

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

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

28 (f) Before July 1, 2010, may display a symbol or artwork approved
29 by the former special license plate review board and the legislature.
30 Beginning July 1, 2010, special license plate series approved by the
31 department and enacted into law by the legislature may display a
32 symbol or artwork approved by the department.

33 (2) **Exceptions to reflectorized materials.** License plates issued
34 before January 1, 1968, are not required to be treated with
35 reflectorized materials.

36 (3) **Dealer license plates.** License plates issued to a dealer must
37 contain an indication that the license plates have been issued to a
38 vehicle dealer.

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

3 (i) Two identical license plates each containing the license
4 plate number; or

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

23 (ii) If the applicable requirements of (b) (iii) of this
24 subsection are met, the display of a single license plate properly
25 attached to a vehicle that has two license plates properly attached
26 in accordance with (a) (i) of this subsection may be temporarily
27 obstructed by one or more of the following devices or by the cargo
28 the device is carrying:

29 (A) A trailer hitch;

30 (B) A wheelchair lift or wheelchair carrier;

31 (C) A trailer being towed by the vehicle, provided the trailer
32 meets any applicable trailer license plate requirements under this
33 chapter; or

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

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

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

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

5 (iv) If the applicable requirements of (b)(iii) of this
6 subsection are met, the display of a single license plate attached to
7 a trailer in accordance with (a)(ii) of this subsection and meeting
8 any applicable trailer license plate requirements under this chapter
9 may be obstructed by a device for transporting a forklift used for
10 product delivery purposes. For purposes of license plate visibility,
11 the single trailer license plate obstructed by a device for carrying
12 a forklift may be relocated on the trailer or the towing vehicle to a
13 position that is more than four feet from the ground.

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

17 (a) Surrender the current license plate or plates to the
18 department, county auditor or other agent, or subagent appointed by
19 the director;

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

21 (c) Pay a change of classification fee required under RCW
22 46.17.310.

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

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

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

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

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

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

38 (e) Transfer a license plate or plates issued under this chapter
39 between two or more vehicles without first making application to
40 transfer the license plates. A violation of this subsection (7)(e) is

1 a traffic infraction subject to a fine not to exceed \$500. Any law
2 enforcement agency that determines that a license plate or plates
3 have been transferred between two or more vehicles shall confiscate
4 the license plate or plates and return them to the department for
5 nullification along with full details of the reasons for
6 confiscation. Each vehicle identified in the transfer will be issued
7 a new license plate or plates upon application by the owner or owners
8 and the payment of full fees and taxes; or

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

11 (8) **Transfer.** (a) Standard issue license plates must be replaced
12 when ownership of the vehicle changes, pursuant to subsection
13 (9)(a)(i) of this section, but the registered owner may retain the
14 license plates and transfer them to a replacement vehicle of the same
15 use. In addition to all other taxes and fees due upon change in
16 ownership, a registered owner wishing to keep standard issue license
17 plates shall pay the license plate transfer fee required under RCW
18 46.17.200(1)(c) when applying for license plate transfer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

14 (b) The application for a replacement license plate or plates
15 must:

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

17 (ii) Be accompanied by the fee required under RCW
18 46.17.200(1)(a), unless the license plate for which a replacement is
19 sought is defective and qualifies for a replacement plate to be
20 issued free of charge or at a reduced fee pursuant to section 2 of
21 this act.

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

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

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

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

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

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

37 (11) **Rules.** The department may adopt rules to implement this
38 section.

39 (12) **Tabs or emblems.** The director may issue tabs or emblems to
40 be attached to license plates or elsewhere on the vehicle to signify

1 initial registration and renewals. Renewals become effective when
2 tabs or emblems have been issued and properly displayed.

3 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** Section 2 of this act is exempt from the
4 rule of strict construction, and shall be liberally construed to give
5 full effect to the objective and purpose of replacing defective
6 license plates in a manner that is consistent with fairness to the
7 person that purchased the license plates.

8 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 5.** This act takes effect January 1, 2027.

Passed by the House March 12, 2026.

Passed by the Senate March 4, 2026.

Approved by the Governor March 24, 2026.

Filed in Office of Secretary of State March 25, 2026.

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