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HOUSE BILL 1963

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State of Washington

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2024 Regular Session

By Representatives Ramos and Fitzgibbon

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1 AN ACT Relating to prohibiting license plate covers; amending RCW  
2 46.16A.200; and adding a new section to chapter 46.16A RCW.

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

4 **Sec. 1.** RCW 46.16A.200 and 2022 c 130 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 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) ~~((Kept))~~ Except as provided in subsection (7)(c)(ii) of  
23 this section, kept clean and uncovered and be able to be plainly seen  
24 and 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) ~~(Use)~~ (i) Except as provided in (c)(ii) of this subsection,  
38 use 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 (~~five hundred~~  
11 ~~dollars~~) \$500. Any law enforcement agency that determines that a  
12 license plate or plates have been transferred between two or more  
13 vehicles shall confiscate the license plate or plates and return them  
14 to the department for nullification along with full details of the  
15 reasons for confiscation. Each vehicle identified in the transfer  
16 will be issued a new license plate or plates upon application by the  
17 owner or owners 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  
28 46.17.200(1)(a).

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

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

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

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

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

2 (c) License plates for commercial motor vehicles with a gross  
3 weight greater than (~~twenty-six thousand~~) 26,000 pounds.

4 (11) **Rules.** The department may adopt rules to implement this  
5 section.

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

10 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 46.16A  
11 RCW to read as follows:

12 Until January 1, 2025, the penalty for a violation of RCW  
13 46.16A.200(7)(c), relating to the use of license plate covers that  
14 make a license plate illegible, may only be a written warning. The  
15 warning must include information about the requirements of the law  
16 and the applicable penalty beginning January 1, 2025.

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