
HOUSE BILL 2197

State of Washington

66th Legislature

2020 Regular Session

By Representatives
Appleton, and Orwall

Thai, McCaslin, Walen,

Slatter, Tarleton,

Prefiled 12/04/19.

1 AN ACT Relating to establishing an exception to the requirement
2 that vehicle license plates be visible at all times for vehicles
3 using certain cargo carrying devices; and reenacting and amending RCW
4 46.16A.200.

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

6 **Sec. 1.** RCW 46.16A.200 and 2014 c 181 s 2 and 2014 c 80 s 1 are
7 each reenacted and amended to read as follows:

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

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

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

15 (c) Must designate the name of the state of Washington without
16 abbreviation;

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

19 (e) Must be of a size and color and show the registration period
20 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) Kept clean and be able to be plainly seen and read at all
26 times unless an exception in (b) of this subsection applies; and

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

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

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

38 (A) A trailer hitch;

39 (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 temporary obstruction of a single license plate under
6 (b)(ii) 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 (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) Use holders, frames, or other materials that change, alter,
29 or make a license plate or plates illegible. License plate frames may
30 be used on license plates only if the frames do not obscure license
31 tabs or identifying letters or numbers on the plates and the license
32 plates can be plainly seen and read at all times;

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

35 (e) Transfer a license plate or plates issued under this chapter
36 between two or more vehicles without first making application to
37 transfer the license plates. A violation of this subsection (7)(e) is
38 a traffic infraction subject to a fine not to exceed five hundred
39 dollars. Any law enforcement agency that determines that a license
40 plate or plates have been transferred between two or more vehicles

1 shall confiscate the license plate or plates and return them to the
2 department for nullification along with full details of the reasons
3 for confiscation. Each vehicle identified in the transfer will be
4 issued a new license plate or plates upon application by the owner or
5 owners and the payment of full fees and taxes; or

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

39 (9) **Replacement.** (a) Except as provided in subsection (8)(a) of
40 this section, an owner or the owner's authorized representative must

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

11 (b) The application for a replacement license plate or plates
12 must:

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

14 (ii) Be accompanied by the fee required under RCW
15 46.17.200(1)(a).

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

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

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

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

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

29 (c) License plates for commercial motor vehicles with a gross
30 weight greater than twenty-six thousand pounds.

31 (11) **Rules.** The department may adopt rules to implement this
32 section.

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

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