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AB-1059 Vehicles: Blackout License Plate Program. (2025-2026)

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AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY APRIL 08, 2025

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CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE— 2025–2026 REGULAR SESSION

ASSEMBLY BILL

NO. 1059

Introduced by Assembly Member Garcia

February 20, 2025

~~An act to amend Section 5024 of, and to add Sections 5023.5 and 5200.5 to, the Vehicle Code, relating to vehicles, and making an appropriation therefor.~~ *An act to add Section 5004.4 to the Vehicle Code, relating to vehicles.*

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 1059, as amended, Garcia. Vehicles: ~~license plates.~~ *Blackout License Plate Program.*

Existing law requires the Department of Motor Vehicles to establish the California Legacy License Plate Program, and to create and issue a series of specialized license plates, consisting of one or more of 3 specified designs that replicate license plates from the state's past.

This bill would require the department to establish the Blackout License Plate Program and create and issue a series of specialized license plates, known as California Blackout Plates, that have a black background with white lettering, if at least 7,500 applications for plates are received and held by the department, on or before January 1, 2030. The bill would require specified additional fees be paid for the issuance, renewal, retention, or transfer of the California Blackout Plates. The bill would require that, upon determination by the department that there are sufficient funds for the program, moneys be available, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to the department for the necessary administrative costs of establishing the program and, as to any remaining moneys, for deposit into the California Environmental License Plate Fund for appropriation by the Legislature pursuant to existing law.

~~Existing law authorizes the Department of Motor Vehicles to issue various specialized license plates, including license plates commemorating the Olympics and special commemorative collegiate license plates.~~

~~This bill, until December 31, 2028, would similarly authorize the department to issue commemorative 2028 Olympic license plates. The bill would authorize existing holders of 2028 Olympic license plates to renew them or transfer them to another vehicle and provide for the department to issue regular series plates whenever holders of 2028 Olympic license plates request substitute~~

~~or duplicate plates on or after January 1, 2029. The bill would direct certain revenues derived from the 2028 Olympic license plates to be deposited in the 2025 Los Angeles Fire Relief Fund, which the bill would establish in the State Treasury, to be continuously appropriated to the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection for purposes of wildfire relief and recovery efforts for areas subject to Executive Order No. N-17-25 issued by the Governor on February 4, 2025. By establishing a new continuously appropriated fund, this bill would make an appropriation.~~

~~The bill would also require the department, every 2 years, to provide outreach to every public or private postsecondary educational institution in the state, that is accredited or has been accepted as a recognized candidate for accreditation by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, on the commemorative reflectorized collegiate plate program described above and the program requirements.~~

~~The bill would also require the department to update and modernize the standard license plates issued by the department to include the option of a black license plate with white lettering. The bill would make certain findings and declarations.~~

Vote: majority Appropriation: **yes**~~no~~ Fiscal Committee: yes Local Program: no

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. *Section 5004.4 is added to the Vehicle Code, to read:*

5004.4. *(a) Subject to subdivision (c), the department shall establish the Blackout License Plate Program and create and issue a series of specialized license plates, known as California Blackout Plates, that have a black background with white lettering. The design of the plates shall be identical, to the extent the department determines it to be reasonably feasible under current manufacturing processes, to a regular license plate.*

(b) An applicant for the specialized license plates described in subdivision (a), who shall be the owner or lessee of the vehicle on which the plates will be displayed, may choose to either accept a license plate character sequence assigned by the department or request a combination of letters or numbers or both, subject to Section 5105.

(c) In addition to the regular fees for an original registration or renewal of registration, the following additional fees shall be paid for the issuance, renewal, retention, or transfer of the specialized license plates:

(1) Fifty dollars (\$50) for the original issuance of the plates.

(2) Forty dollars (\$40) for a renewal of registration with the plates.

(3) Fifteen dollars (\$15) for transfer of the plates to another vehicle.

(4) Thirty-five dollars (\$35) for each substitute replacement plate.

(5) Thirty-eight dollars (\$38), when the payment of renewal fees is not required as specified in Section 4000 and the holder of the specialized license plates retains the plates. The fee shall be due at the expiration of the registration year of the vehicle to which the specialized license plates were assigned. This paragraph shall not apply when a plate character sequence is assigned by the department pursuant to subdivision (b).

(d) Sections 5106 and 5108 do not apply to the specialized license plates issued pursuant to this section.

(e) The department shall not issue California Blackout Plates for a vehicle that is exempt from the payment of registration fees pursuant to Section 9101 or 9103.

(f) (1) The department shall not establish the California Blackout License Plate Program until the department has received not less than 7,500 paid applications for plates. The department shall collect and hold applications for the plates. The department shall not issue a specialized license plate until it has received not less than 7,500 paid applications for any one of the particular plates within the time period prescribed in this section.

(2) The department shall have until January 1, 2030, to receive the required number of applications. If, after that date, 7,500 paid applications have not been received for the plate described in subdivision (a), the department shall immediately refund to all applicants all fees or deposits that have been collected.

(g) (1) Upon a determination by the department that there are sufficient funds for the program, moneys shall be available, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to the department for the necessary administrative costs of establishing the California Blackout License Plate Program.

(2) After deducting its administrative costs under this subdivision, the department shall deposit any additional revenue derived from the issuance, renewal, transfer, retention, and substitution of the specialized license plates into the California

Environmental License Plate Fund, for appropriation by the Legislature pursuant to existing law. For purposes of this paragraph, "administrative costs" includes the costs of including the California Blackout License Plates in materials that promote special license plates authorized by this chapter.

SECTION 1. ~~The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:~~

~~(a) Existing law prohibits a person from displaying upon a vehicle a license plate that is altered from its original markings. However, a recent rise in the use of illegal, differently colored license plates indicates a clear demand among California residents for license plates in colors other than the current standard white license plate.~~

~~(b) The Department of the California Highway Patrol issued approximately 990 citations for altered license plates in 2022 alone. Officers lose valuable time and resources when conducting stops for these violations that could otherwise be directed towards more pressing and pertinent traffic safety issues.~~

~~(c) To further combat this issue, the City of San Francisco issued cease and desist letters to retailers such as Amazon, eBay, and Walmart in 2023 to prevent the sale of illegal license plate covers. These products include license plate wraps and digital license plates that cover the original plate's numbers.~~

~~(d) The increased popularity of these illegal products demonstrates that California residents have an interest in greater options for their license plates.~~

SEC. 2. ~~Section 5023.5 is added to the Vehicle Code, to read:~~

~~5023.5.(a)(1) Until December 31, 2028, a person described in Section 5101 may also apply for a set of commemorative 2028 Olympic reflectorized license plates and the department shall issue those special license plates in lieu of regular license plates. The 2028 Olympic reflectorized license plates shall be of a distinctive design and shall be available in a special series of letters or numbers, or both, as determined by the department after consultation with the Los Angeles Organizing Committee for the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games.~~

~~(2) On or after January 1, 2029, original, substitute, or duplicate commemorative 2028 Olympic license plates shall not be available. However, the holder of 2028 Olympic license plates may thereafter renew or retain those plates, or transfer them to another vehicle, subject to this section. Unless otherwise provided by this code, regular series plates shall be issued for the fee provided in Section 9265 whenever substitute or duplicate plates are requested.~~

~~(b) In addition to the regular fees for an original registration or renewal of registration, both of the following special fees shall be paid:~~

~~(1) Fifteen dollars (\$15) for the transfer of the special plates to another vehicle.~~

~~(2) Thirty dollars (\$30) for the annual renewal of the special plates.~~

~~(c) When payment of renewal fees is not required as specified in Section 4000, or when the person determines to retain the plates upon sale, trade, or other release of the vehicle upon which the special plates have been displayed, the person shall notify the department and the person may retain the special plates.~~

~~(d) All revenue derived from the additional special fees provided in this section, less costs incurred by the department pursuant to this section, shall be deposited in the 2025 Los Angeles Fire Relief Fund, which is hereby established in the State Treasury. Moneys in the fund are continuously appropriated to the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection for purposes of wildfire relief and recovery efforts for areas subject to Executive Order No. N-17-25 issued by the Governor on February 4, 2025.~~

SEC. 3. ~~Section 5024 of the Vehicle Code is amended to read:~~

~~5024.(a) A person described in Section 5101 may also apply for a set of commemorative collegiate reflectorized license plates, and the department shall issue those special license plates in lieu of the regular license plates. The collegiate reflectorized plates shall be of a distinctive design, and shall be available in a special series of letters or numbers, or both, as determined by the department. The collegiate reflectorized plates shall also contain the name of the participating institution as well as the reflectorized logotype, motto, symbol, or other distinctive design, as approved by the department, representing the participating university or college selected by the applicant. The department may issue the commemorative collegiate reflectorized license plates as environmental license plates, as defined in Section 5103, in a combination of numbers or letters, or both, as requested by the owner or lessee of the vehicle.~~

~~(b) Any public or private postsecondary educational institution in the state, which is accredited or has been accepted as a recognized candidate for accreditation by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, may indicate to the department its decision to be included in the commemorative collegiate license plate program and submit its distinctive design for the logotype, motto, symbol, or other design. However, no public or private postsecondary educational institution may be included in the~~

program until not less than 5,000 applications are received for license plates containing that institution's logotype, motto, symbol, or other design. Each participating institution shall collect and hold applications for collegiate license plates until it has received at least 5,000 applications. Once the institution has received at least 5,000 applications, it shall submit the applications, along with the necessary fees, to the department. Upon receiving the first application, the institution shall have one calendar year to receive the remaining required applications. If, after that one calendar year, 5,000 applications have not been received, the institution shall refund to all applicants any fees or deposits which have been collected.

~~(c) In addition to the regular fees for an original registration, a renewal of registration, or a transfer of registration, the following commemorative collegiate license plate fees shall be paid:~~

~~(1) Fifty dollars (\$50) for the initial issuance of the plates. These plates shall be permanent and shall not be required to be replaced.~~

~~(2) Forty dollars (\$40) for each renewal of registration which includes the continued display of the plates.~~

~~(3) Fifteen dollars (\$15) for transfer of the plates to another vehicle.~~

~~(4) Thirty-five dollars (\$35) for replacement plates, if the plates become damaged or unserviceable.~~

~~(d) When payment of renewal fees is not required as specified in Section 4000, or when the person determines to retain the commemorative collegiate license plates upon sale, trade, or other release of the vehicle upon which the plates have been displayed, the person shall notify the department and the person may retain the plates.~~

~~(e) Of the revenue derived from the additional special fees provided in this section, less costs incurred by the department pursuant to this section, one-half shall be deposited in the California Collegiate License Plate Fund, which is hereby created, and one-half shall be deposited in the California Environmental License Plate Fund.~~

~~(f) The money in the California Collegiate License Plate Fund is, notwithstanding Section 13340 of the Government Code, continuously appropriated to the Controller for allocation as follows:~~

~~(1) To the governing body of participating public institutions in the proportion that funds are collected on behalf of each, to be used for need-based scholarships, distributed according to federal student aid guidelines.~~

~~(2) With respect to funds collected on behalf of accredited nonprofit, private, and independent colleges and universities in the state, to the California Student Aid Commission for grants to students at those institutions, in the proportion that funds are collected on behalf of each institution, who demonstrate eligibility and need in accordance with the Cal Grant Program pursuant to Chapter 1.7 (commencing with Section 69430) of Part 42 of the Education Code, but who did not receive an award based on a listing prepared by the California Student Aid Commission.~~

~~(g) The scholarships and grants shall be awarded without regard to race, religion, creed, sex, or age.~~

~~(h) The Resources License Plate Fund is hereby abolished and all remaining funds shall be transferred to the California Environmental License Plate Fund effective July 1, 2014.~~

~~(i) The department shall, every two years, provide outreach to every public or private postsecondary educational institution in the state, that is accredited or has been accepted as a recognized candidate for accreditation by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, on the commemorative reflectorized collegiate plate program and program requirements described in this section.~~

SEC. 4. Section 5200.5 is added to the Vehicle Code, to read:

5200.5. The department shall update and modernize the standard license plates issued by the department to include the option of a black license plate with white lettering.