



Department of the Secretary of State Bureau of Motor Vehicles

Shenna Bellows
Secretary of State

Catherine Curtis
Deputy Secretary of State

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

L.D. 369 “An Act Allow Repurposed Military Vehicles to Be Registered and Operated on Maine Roads

Shenna Bellows, Secretary of State

Department of the Secretary of State

March 21, 2023

Senator Chipman, Representative Williams, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation, my name is Shenna Bellows. I am the Secretary of State and chief motor vehicle officer. I am providing testimony in opposition to L.D. 369 “An Act To Allow Repurposed Military Vehicles to Be Registered and Operated on Maine Roads.”

The Bureau of Motor Vehicles supports roadway safety by ensuring drivers possess the knowledge, skills and driving history to operate safely and that vehicles meet qualification to be registered and titled.

Historically, Maine has adopted the philosophy that all vehicles designated for use on Maine roadways must meet the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards at the time of manufacture, the United States Environmental Protection Agency's pollutant requirements or the National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration's crash testing standards. This is reflected in current Maine law, 29-A MRSA §101, sub-§47-A, which states that vehicles that do not meet these standards and were not originally manufactured to meet Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards are considered “Off-road Vehicles.” This includes former military vehicles.

This bill proposes to create an exception to Maine’s longstanding tradition of adherence to federal standards for vehicle registration purposes for “demilitarized” vehicles, defined “as an automobile that was built for and used by the United States Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Space Force or Coast Guard and has been lawfully purchased by a person for civilian use.

It allows for the registration of a demilitarized vehicle upon application and evidence of the transfer of title from the United States Government to the registrant and an affidavit that the vehicle is garaged or maintained in the State. The registration must indicate that the vehicle is a demilitarized vehicle.

It also requires the Secretary of State to create and issue a new license plate specifically for demilitarized vehicles in a 3-number and 3-letter combination and to issue the new plate as vanity plates.

The proposal also sets a weight limit for demilitarized vehicles not to exceed 10,000 pounds and requires these vehicles to be inspected except that the Chief of the State Police may provide certain exemptions.

We oppose this bill for three reasons.

1. It requires vehicles that were not manufactured for on-road use, to be operated on Maine's roadways, therefore creating a potential unsafe vehicle traveling at speeds that it may not be designed for, and in weather and road conditions they were not meant to travel in. We must all be concerned for the safety of not just the owner or operator of the vehicle but for everyone else with whom they are sharing the road.
2. It requires a new plate to be issued and as you know, there is currently a moratorium on new plates.
3. There will be a significant fiscal note to create a new plate and to modify computer systems to distinguish the vehicle as a demilitarized vehicle on registration documents.

An on-line search disclosed the following demilitarized vehicles for sale:



2009 AM General M1167 HMMWV 4 Door Hard Top w/Slant Back



2001 AM General M997A2 HMMWV 2 Door Hard Top w/Ambulance Body



2008 AM General M1097R1 HMMWV 4 Door Soft Top w/Truck Body

Of these concerns, our primary one is safety. As you can see these vehicles are manufactured with a specific purpose in mind – and not for driving on streets, roads, and highways. They are not manufactured to meet Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS.). They do not have restraint systems, or airbags, and are not designed with other occupant protection interior features to prevent serious injury or death. These vehicles are not manufactured to operate at high speeds, which is common for general U.S. roadway traffic. They have heavier component parts which prevent damage and injury to the occupant in combat situations, but also increase the likelihood of injury or death to the occupant of another vehicle in the event of a crash. This heavier structure may cause the vehicle to be unstable. In a crash it may cause ~~deadly~~, significant damage to another vehicle and possible injury or death to the occupants in the other vehicle. We are also concerned that obtaining insurance for these vehicles will be problematic.

The state police will share crash data with you to supports these concerns.

Additionally, we should note that Maine’s practice of adhering to federal environmental and safety standards to make determinations about what is and is not allowed on Maine roadways is far more objective and predictable than embarking upon a path of exceptions in Maine statute that may or may not be grounded in highway safety best practices. In a time in which crashes and motor vehicle-related fatalities are on the rise, we strongly recommend against departures from these standards in terms of what is allowed on the road.

The safety of Maine’s road users are of paramount importance to the Department and it is for these reasons we are respectfully opposing this bill and recommend a unanimous ought not to pass vote from this committee. Thank you for your time today and I will be happy to answer any questions.