



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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26 Mar 25

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: LD1156 An Act to Allow Military Surplus Vehicles to Be Collected and Used in Patriotic Exhibitions and Parades

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts and distinguished members of the Committee On Transportation,

1. Thank you for allowing me to present to you my bill, An Act to Allow Military Surplus Vehicles to Be Collected and Used in Patriotic Exhibitions and Parades. Before I begin, I would like to familiarize you with a little bit of my background with military vehicles and my interest in this bill.

2. While serving with the Tiger Brigade of the Second Armored Division, one of my additional duties was that of Master Driver and Driver Training Non-Commissioned Officer In Charge at the battalion level. I attended the US Army Master Driver School and was licensed to operate all wheeled and military vehicles in the US Army Table Of Organization and Equipment (TO&E), both wheeled and tracked, weighing 67 short tons (134,000lb) or less. I personally trained and supervised the training of several thousand soldiers assigned to a Heavy Armor Battalion as well as acted as an instructor at the brigade level. I was responsible for the development of the battalion's Driver Training Program and the individual licensing of soldiers on any number of vehicles they were expected to operate – from main battle tanks and self propelled artillery, personnel carriers, heavy equipment transports, wheeled and tracked recovery vehicles, cargo and tanker trucks, all the way down to the ubiquitous "Humvee" (HMMWV). I instructed soldiers in their safe on road and off road operation as well as emergency situations and vehicle recovery. Because of my background and my interest in military history, I have had a great appreciation for military vehicles dating back to the Second World War.

3. I am introducing this bill because collectors, clubs and veteran organizations in Maine have no opportunity to register a vehicle that was formerly designated as a "military vehicle" for infrequent road usage for the purposes of transporting the vehicles for maintenance or repair, for sale purposes, to participate in parades, exhibitions or other patriotic events or even educational events.

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4. Currently, such vehicles are designated as “off road” vehicles because they often do not meet safety requirements provided by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) at the time of their build with the prevailing argument against the registration of such vehicle being safety concerns.
5. However, under Maine law, citizens, collectors and clubs are able to register vehicles for on-road use that were built prior to the establishment of NHTSA in 1970 or even before the 1966 passage of the Highway Safety Act as Antique Autos under §457 as a hobbyist plate. Additional vehicles allowed to be registered under this section include Custom Vehicles, Horseless Carriages, Street Rods and antique motorcycles. All of these vehicles are allowed to be operated legally on public ways with a set of limitations recognizing that they are not meant to be used for regular passenger or cargo service, are not as numerous as more modern vehicles and with the understanding that because of their costs and uniqueness such vehicles are very often operated in a manner that would protect the owner’s investments into the vehicle.
6. Additionally, under Maine law, a person can operate an unregistered piece of farm equipment on the public way under a certain set of circumstances, even when none of these tractors or implements abide by NHTSA safety guidelines because they are not classified as motor vehicles by NHTSA.
7. The Secretary of State is also allowed, by statute, to issue registration plates to motorhomes of all sizes – Class A, B & C. Class A motorhomes specifically are not generally required to meet NHTSA crash safety standards, though some manufacturers do some testing on frames or other components.
8. And finally, under §457 the Secretary is authorized under statute the discretion to issue year-long special permits for golf carts, lawn mowers and ATVs under certain circumstances that allow them to be used on the public way as long as they operated in a way that minimizes the danger of the operator. None of these vehicles are required to pass NHTSA safety standards, be insured or inspected and do not even have to be operated by a licensed operator.
9. The Legislature has also provided for exemptions on vehicle inspections, to include farm tractors, antiques, farm trucks and fish trucks, again recognizing the value of the interests of Maine citizens that outweighed the requirement based on the limited use of such vehicles in the state and the types of vehicles used.

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10. All of these exemptions exist because the Maine Legislature recognized that the interests of Maine citizens in certain activities or special circumstances were more important than seeking an unattainable level of highway safety after having had considered the infrequent usage and limited usage scenarios, general operating modes and other related factors.

11. This bill would allow for certain vehicles that were manufactured specifically for the armed forces be allowed to be registered for limited use in the way that antiques are registered – for limited use for vehicle maintenance, for commemorative or educational activities, or even the occasional “shakedown drive”. I know, from extensive experience, that many of the vehicles that would be allowed to be registered are built safer than some of the antique autos that we allow to be registered and operated on our roads today simply because they were built to withstand harsh conditions and extended use.

12. I became interested in this issue during the last legislative session and spent many hours trying to find statistical data that shows the registration of such vehicles in the manner proposed causes any significant increase in highway crashes, crash injuries or motor vehicle deaths. As NHTSA reporting standards group vehicles by type, there is no category in these reports for “Military Surplus” vehicles, but there is a category for ‘Recreational Off Road Vehicles’ (which is how NHTSA currently defines these vehicles). Reading the “2020 Traffic Safety Facts: A Compilation of Motor Vehicle Crash Data” published by NHTSA (chosen because the date was before the federal notices to states), of the 52,698 vehicles in the listed crashes in 2020 where there were 38,824 fatalities, only 217 (.004%) of the vehicles listed were ‘Recreational Off Road Vehicles’, with no indication that all 217 of these vehicles were surplus vehicles. Even if we assumed any surplus vehicles involved in fatal accidents were otherwise coded as ‘Utility, Unknown Body Type’ (4 vehicles), ‘Unknown Pickup Style’ (10 vehicles), ‘Unknown Light Truck Type’ (4 vehicles), ‘Unknown Light Vehicle Type’ (50 vehicles), ‘Unknown Medium Truck’ (1 vehicle) and ‘Unknown Medium/Heavy Truck Type’ (21 vehicles) and we assumed that all of those numbers are for surplus vehicles, that is still only 90 vehicles (.0017% of all vehicles).

12. I want to reiterate that even if all of the vehicles listed (Off Road and other) in the crash data above were military surplus vehicles, that is still only a total of 307 (.0058%) of all motor vehicles in crashes with fatalities. This is not a statistically significant number of vehicles of the total number of vehicles.

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13. Although the National Roadway Safety Strategy (NRSS) calls for 0 highway deaths, that is an unrealistic goal, even if it is one we should continuously strive for. The only real way to achieve 0 deaths is to have 0 vehicles and 0 miles driven. Based on these low numbers, what I know of the low number of such owned and operated vehicles, and the fact that most crashes are caused by a combination of driver inattentiveness, speed and alcohol, I consistently fail to see the 'safety factor' argument as having compelling weight over the needs, desires and rights of the Maine citizens who own such vehicles.

14. After the federal government began sending notices to withhold highway funds from states that allow for the registration of former military vehicles, most states forbade their registration in any form. However, there are currently numerous bills moving their way across state legislatures to exempt historical military vehicles to be registered for the use of patriotic, commemorative and educational events. To my knowledge, to date, Nebraska, Nevada and Texas have already signed such bills into law.

15. I firmly believe that if we, as legislators, allow for registering of surplus military vehicles for limited uses, such as commemorative, patriotic and educational events and the few reasons presented auxiliary to these functions, we can do so in good conscience without introducing any significant increase in the risk of injury or death to Maine people. This is especially true since this bill would only allow for the registration of surplus vehicles that had wheeled drivetrains and weighted under 10,000 lb (though honestly I would prefer that number be 15,000 lb).

16. I thank you for your polite consideration in this matter and look forward to discussion on any of the points I brought forward in this testimony. I respectfully urge the committee to vote Ought To Pass on LD1156.

Respectfully,



Rep. Chad R. Perkins
District 31

CF:

Committee Chair Senator Nangle
Committee Chair Representative Crafts
Committee Members

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