



Department of the Secretary of State Bureau of Motor Vehicles

Shenna Bellows
Secretary of State

Catherine Curtis
Deputy Secretary of State

Stephen P. Ashcroft
Director of Vehicle Services

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

L.D. 644 “An Act Regarding Motor Vehicle Registration Violations”

Testimony Provided by Shenna Bellows, Secretary of State

March 16, 2019

Senator Diamond, Representative Martin, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation, my name is Shenna Bellows. I am the Secretary of State and speaking neither for nor against L.D. 644. We applaud the sponsor for recognizing the importance of eliminating practices that unnecessarily criminalize certain violations of the current law and agree that a potential solution would be sending notifications out to drivers before their registration expires.

Vehicle registration advances highway safety by helping to verify vehicle identification, ownership and financial responsibility, which is especially important when there is a crime, crash or traffic violation. It is in the state’s interest that members of the public register their vehicles in a timely and regular manner. The Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) receives nearly 1.4 million vehicle registrations annually and has implemented rapid renewal online registration, which allows members of the public from participating more than 300 municipalities to register their vehicles, paying the state motor vehicle registration fee and the excise tax. In 2020, 330,358 registrations took place through rapid renewal, an increase from about 151,000 online registrations in 2019. Users of the rapid renewal system can sign up for an email reminder that their registration is due about a month before the deadline. The bureau only sends out reminders to those who sign up voluntarily to receive them.

Maine is one of six states that we know of that does not send automatic notices to owners of the nearly 1.4 million registered vehicles, and this has never been the practice in our state. (One of the six states is Utah, which suspended its notification system due to budget woes in 2020. The Utah legislature passed legislation on March 9 to reinstate notifications.) In Maine, it has been thought that the registration stickers displayed prominently on the vehicle license plate are a sufficient reminder as well as the information on the registration card itself. Additionally, there is a recognition that registration notification would require substantial additional resources. We estimate it would cost more than \$600,000 to print and mail 1.4 million annual notices to Mainers. This is consistent with the costs reported in other states.

Electronic, or even telephonic, notifications could be possible if the bureau had sufficient resources to upgrade current technology. The Department of Motor Vehicles in New York State for example does send out automatic electronic reminders once an online registration renewal transaction is completed.¹

¹ State of New York, Department of Motor Vehicles, *Get email and/or text reminders*, <https://dmv.ny.gov/more-info/get-email-and-or-text-reminders> (last accessed March 11, 2021).

In 2015, New York implemented the e-Notification service to notify drivers via text or email to renew their registration and “save taxpayers an estimated \$500,000 per year” in lieu of sending paper notifications.² If we had the proper upgrades, we could mirror New York State’s policy. There would be a policy question involved with whether the legislature would want to mandate that Mainers share their email address or telephone number with the bureau as a requirement of vehicle registration. The bureau would need to invest in appropriate technology upgrades to capture and securely manage and store this type of data should we be directed to do so.

We support decriminalization of failure to register. As a technical matter, in the absence of a centralized system for tracking warnings, the warning provision of the bill could have the unintended consequence of reducing compliance, registration fees and excise taxes collected by the municipalities. Title 29A and Title 36, provide that during the last 4 months of a registration period, fees are half rated. Registration software used by the bureau, and the several vendor supplied systems used by municipalities, have this hard coded into their systems. Without law enforcement access to information that someone has previously received a warning, a person who deliberately refuses to register might escape consequence for a significant period of time and benefit from paying reduced registration fees later in the year. There may be alternatives to strengthen compliance.

We are committed to working with the sponsor and the Legislature to find ways to support Mainers in fulfilling their legal responsibility to register their vehicles, and we are available to answer any questions.

² State of New York, Department of Motor Vehicles, *New York State DMV Announces New Initiative to Save Taxpayers More than \$500,000*, Oct. 14 2015, <https://dmv.ny.gov/press-release/press-release-10-14-15>.