



Department of the Secretary of State Bureau of Motor Vehicles

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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

L.D. 1124 “An Act To Change the Threshold for Creating a Specialty License Plate from 2,000 Prepaid Orders to 1,000 Prepaid Orders and To Extend by One Year the Time Allowed for Gathering Signatures”

Testimony Provided by Stephen P. Ashcroft, Director of Vehicle Services Bureau of Motor Vehicles

Department of the Secretary of State

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Senator Diamond, Representative Martin, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation, my name is Stephen Ashcroft and I am the Director of Vehicle Services for the Bureau of Motor Vehicles. I am representing the bureau today speaking in opposition to L.D. 1124.

My testimony today will be similar to that of which I provided to the committee on the proposed legislation L.D. 79 An Act To Establish a Honeybee Special Registration Plate and other legislation creating new registration plates.

Maine currently has 63 different and unique registration plates, soon to be 64 should the Lighthouse plate be enacted. Included in that 63 we also have 10 and soon to be 11 “specialty plates” that are by statute a mechanism for fund-raising purposes. The bureau receives numerous inquiries throughout the year regarding the process of creating another specialty plate. In my testimony on L.D. 79, I made the committee aware that the ability for the bureau and its municipal partners to continue to have on hand, store and maintain plate inventory is becoming problematic. This is an important point as municipalities perform 80% of our 1.4 million registrations yearly. Many offices are small, lightly staffed and are already overwhelmed while performing a tremendous amount of work processing registrations. A system in which there is no defined number of registration plates being produced and made available for the public will soon become extremely difficult to manage. Additionally, Maine’s plate making process is a design from the 1940’s and 50’s and does not allow for a rapid plate making process. This process is a hydraulic press which literally makes one set of plates at a time. When a particular style of plate is made, the plate must be made in batches. The process does not allow switching from plate type to plate type easily. This leads to large amounts of plates being made and then stored when each batch is run. The more plate styles we have, the more swapping of batch jobs there are. Also, space at the prison is limited.

The original purpose and role of a registration plate is first and foremost one of visual compliance of our registration laws and identification of the vehicle and owner. Over time, the registration plate has become a mechanism for other purposes, one of which is fundraising. There have been a number of worthy causes over the years which have used this process to raise money and create

awareness, to include state government. Having said this, we believe the time has come to discuss how many registration plates are too many, and what is the role of government in producing and making so many varieties available to the public. LD 1618 will do exactly that and more. That legislation will establish a study regarding the registration plate creation, process and administration with the goal of creating a well-defined strategic plan for the future.

This proposed legislation would lower the bar significantly with regard to establishing a new specialty plate. The bureau is concerned that not only will we find ourselves with so many different kinds of plates that we and our municipal partners will not be able to administer it all, but it will also negatively impact the current specialty plates that we already have. As I've stated, there have been many worthy causes, but a proliferation of plates only serves to erode at those established fund-raising efforts from the past. One example I can share with you is that there are two current applicants whose plate design and purpose could directly compete with our Sportsman specialty plate which supports Inland Fisheries and Wildlife efforts. This Sportsman's plate is the most popular specialty plate with approximately 40,000 citizens paying an extra fee to support its causes. Private entity competition for the funds associated with this plate only serve to diminish what these funds support.

We ask that the committee decline lowering this threshold and instead open discussions on the future of all plates to include specialty plates and by doing so formulate a strategic plan to administer registration plates logically and consistently for now and the future.

I look forward to the work session and I'd be happy to answer any questions of the committee at this time.