



Department of the Secretary of State Bureau of Motor Vehicles

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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

L.D. 1618 “Resolve, To Place a Temporary Moratorium on the Approval of Any New Motor Vehicle Registration Plates and Initiate a Registration Plate Working Group”

Testimony Provided by Secretary of State Shenna Bellows

Department of the Secretary of State

May 4, 2021

Senator Diamond, Representative Martin, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation, my name is Shenna Bellows and I am the Secretary of State. I am here today speaking in favor of this legislation to place a temporary moratorium on the approval of any new motor vehicle registration plates and to form a registration plate working group to study the issue. Through the working group, we hope to begin discussions regarding registration plates in general, and more specifically the purpose and role of specialty plates.

You have heard from your municipal clerks and from our department numerous times, the sheer number of registration plates is growing fast and is quickly outpacing the ability for us and our municipal partners to store and manage all this inventory. This is not a small issue given that the municipalities process approximately 80% of the 1.4 million registrations issued each year. Additionally, while some states have moved to on-demand plate production, Maine still uses the traditional plate-making process with a hydraulic press issuing one batch at a time.

This committee is well aware of the sheer number of plate requests there are annually and the need to have a more well-defined process and plan in place to consider these requests. Section 468 and 468-A addressed this need in the past, but this was years ago. We now find ourselves at a juncture where more and more entities are looking for a way to raise awareness and money and have chosen registration plates as one of those tools. As an example, during this session alone, there was proposed legislation for a honeybee plate and for a multiple sclerosis plate and a bill reducing the threshold for new specialty plates. Three entities are now collecting signatures hoping to introduce a new specialty plates, one entity is in the design phase and an existing specialty plate would like to expand into three more plate classes. Most proposed specialty plates represent a worthy cause, but the proliferation of new fundraising efforts means a dilution or reduction of revenues available for existing efforts.

With 63 registration plates and counting, we feel it's time once again to examine all aspects of our registration plate program. The proposal before you would put a temporary pause on any new plate creation to facilitate a working group to study the mounting issues, challenges and concerns. We envision a collaborative effort as outlined in the bill which would allow us to better lay out a strategic plan for the future. There are a host of issues that need to be considered and the makeup of this working group would be uniquely qualified in addressing each and every one of those.

We know that Mainers love their registration plates. This legislation will allow us to proceed into the future with a plan and structure that will continue to provide Mainers with a variety of choices for years to come.

We urge the committee to support this proposal to study and implement a strategic plan for registration plates, and we look forward to working with the committee during the work session and would be happy to answer any questions that you may have at this time.