

Bill Seeks to Place Moratorium on Specialty License Plates

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Joe Fulgham (302) 744-4184

Two state legislators say they plan to introduce a bill to bar the creation of new specialty license plates in Delaware for the next three years.

The legislation, sponsored by State House Minority Leader Dick Cathcart (R-Middletown) and State Rep. Dave Wilson (R-Cedar Creek Hundred), is in reaction to a letter from Division of Motor Vehicles Director Jennifer Cohan asking that the General Assembly “consider limiting/capping the number of specialty plate legislative initiatives.”

In the letter sent to all state legislators, Ms. Cohan acknowledged many worthwhile organizations seek their own specialty license plates to both promote their causes and raise revenue. However, she noted that adding to the more than 100 specialty plates currently managed by the DMV is placing an increasing burden on her agency.

“Every specialty plate has to be designed, created, managed and audited by DMV personnel,” Ms. Cohan wrote. “The division must work with our license plate vendor through the set-up and design process. For each new specialty plate created, an administration process has to be implemented to ensure only qualified applicants can purchase the specialty plate. Once the plate is designed and customers can begin ordering, the whole process from procurement from the manufacturer to distributing the plate to the new owner is managed by one staff person at the DMV. ... At this time, the cumulative effect of additional specialty plates would place significant strain on the resources of DMV and create adverse impacts on our customers.”

Rep. Cathcart said the bill would impose a three-year moratorium on the creation of new license plates, starting January 1st. “Specialty plates have their place and serve a purpose. I’ve voted for many of these plates myself, but we’ve reached a point where they have the potential to hamper the DMV’s customer service. This bill will give the agency a little breathing room and an opportunity to improve the system.”

There are specialty tags for a wide range of community groups, alumni organizations and former service personnel. Members of the Knights of Columbus, those who have earned the Bronze Star, and people who have graduated from Purdue University can currently purchase plates from the DMV promoting their status.

“Where the DMV is the butt of jokes in other states, Delaware is unique in the high quality of its motor vehicle agency,” Rep. Wilson said. “This bill will include a provision for the DMV to issue a report at the end of the moratorium detailing the number of each of the specialty plates they’ve issued during the period, as well as any recommendations they may have for improving the system. Using this data, and working with the DMV, lawmakers can then decide if further action is needed.”

The proposed bill would not impact pending legislation, which will need to be acted on by the end of the legislative session on June 30th. Those measures include bills to create specialty tags for veterans for Operation Enduring Freedom (HB 383); Safe Haven No Kill Animal Sanctuary (HB 397); and the Delaware Breast Cancer Coalition (SB 251).

Rep. Cathcart notes the idea of a moratorium is not new. “During portions of the Carper and Minner administrations, there was an informal moratorium on such tags because both governors indicated they would not sign any bills creating new plates. The difference with our proposal is that it serves a constructive purpose to address a situation that has gotten a little out of control.”

Rep. Wilson said the bill would be introduced shortly after legislators return to work June 1st.

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