

Transportation Committee testimony  
specialty license plates  
Rep. Linda Bebko-Jones

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony on Pennsylvania's specialty license plate program. The issuance of commemorative license plates has benefited the Commonwealth by drawing attention to important issues such as wildlife conservation and historic preservation, while providing a revenue source to fund these initiatives.

Currently, I am sponsor of House Bill 833, which is pending in the Transportation Committee. The bill would create a lighthouse registration plate to help fund the preservation of Pennsylvania's three existing lighthouses -- the Erie Harbor North Pier Light; the Erie Land Light; and the Presque Isle Light. A portion of the money raised from the sale of these plates would be used to preserve, maintain and operate these structures.

These lighthouses are accessible, in some way, to the public, and the Erie Harbor North Pier Light still is an active aid to navigation at the Erie Harbor Channel entrance. They are a common part of the landscape of the Lake Erie region, but they are structural gems that stand as symbols of our Commonwealth's maritime heritage. For that reason, they have significant educational and historical value.

Creating a commemorative license plate to depict Pennsylvania's lighthouses would provide a new source of funding to ensure their upkeep in a day and age when requests for available dollars typically outweighs available funds. Certainly, there are numerous other worthwhile subjects that would benefit from this fund raising option.

Yes, the Department of Transportation should have discretion in approving such plates. Political opinions or controversial subject matter have no place on state-issued license plates because they unduly involve the Commonwealth in the debate of issues of personal choice.

And care needs to be taken in the design of specialty plates to ensure that law enforcement can easily make out the state of origin and registration number.

But specialty license plates that already have been issued have helped to raise money for programs that are important to our heritage. It's a good source of revenue that benefits motorists, as well, because it gives them a choice about what license plate they want for their car.

I support the continued issuance of commemorative license plates in Pennsylvania, and urge passage of House Bill 833.