

Pennsylvania State Police Testimony
House Transportation Committee
Vendor-Designed Specialty Registration Plates
December 13, 2021



Good morning Chairmen and members of the committee. I am Major Robert J. Krol, Jr., Director of the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) Bureau of Patrol. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to provide information pertaining to proposed changes to the Pennsylvania registration plates that would allow for the creation and issuance of vendor-designed specialty registration plates.

Registration plates are issued to motor vehicles to allow for identification of the vehicle. For this reason, there is a need for the plate to be consistent in its design, while having clearly displayed numbers and letters on a contrasting background that easily allows for identification of the plate number and the state of issuance. This is especially important for rapid identification of a vehicle by law enforcement, as well as victims and witnesses of criminal activity involving a motor vehicle. Further, registration plate identification is critical to carrying out traffic enforcement using the automated enforcement systems authorized by the Pennsylvania Vehicle Code. Each of these systems – automated traffic-signal red light enforcement, automated work zone speed enforcement, and automated school bus stop arm enforcement – rely on images or video of the offending vehicle and its registration plate in order for the enforcement action to be instituted. Lastly, registration plate identification is also important to the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission (PTC), which relies on plate identification for the PTC's toll-by-plate model for those motorists who do not have an EZ Pass transponder, or in the event an EZ Pass transponder is inoperable.

To ensure the Pennsylvania registration plates meet this criteria, the PSP and Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) have partnered together to support a single design of registration plate that is uniform in appearance, but still allows for plates supporting special organizations and personalized plate numbers. Registration plates meeting this uniform “family of plates” design allow for instant identification of a Pennsylvania registration plate from the vast array of designs from the other states. The state identification is a key piece of information necessary for running the registration to identify the registered owner. Knowing the state of issuance is even more critical when a crime victim or witness is only able to obtain a partial registration number, as having the state information drastically narrows the search parameters and greatly speeds up the process of trying to identify the vehicle and its registered owner.

In review of the proposed legislation to allow for vendor-designed Pennsylvania registration plates, it is clear that the design of the plates would be wholly different in appearance from the “family” of other standard registration plates issued by PennDOT. This will present problems for those who must quickly identify a plate (e.g., law enforcement, victims and witnesses to crimes, etc.). PSP has historically opposed legislation that makes available outlier Pennsylvania registration plates that deviate in appearance from the current “family” of registration plates issued by PennDOT. We remain consistent with past practice and would, therefore, oppose this draft legislation.

Once again, I would like to thank the committee for inviting the PSP here to speak on this matter. I will now be happy to take any questions you may have.