



# Van H. Wanggaard

Wisconsin State Senator

## TESTIMONY ON ASSEMBLY BILL 432

Thank you Mr. Chairman and committee members for today's hearing on Assembly Bill 432. This bill makes much needed updates to our license plate statutes.

Anyone driving in Wisconsin can see the poor condition of many of our license plates. Some are literally unreadable, with only the imprint of the letters visible. You can't see the painted letters and numbers, and they do not reflect light well. Others are covered in so many registration stickers that the plate is more sticker than metal.

This causes problems for several different groups. Police and sheriff groups cannot easily identify vehicles with our current plates. When a car ignores a school bus stop sign, the bus driver can't report the car to authorities, or worse, will report the wrong vehicle to authorities. Automatic plate readers from parking lot gates, law enforcement, and curbside takeout have a difficult time identifying the proper vehicle.

These issues with our license plates are the result of two issues: Poor and outdated license plate sheeting and age of our plates. In short, both our license plates and the sheeting on them are too old. These problems were compounded about this time last year, when the Department of Corrections used a gubernatorial waiver to extend the contract with the current license plate sheeting manufacturer. Extending the use of the outdated license plate sheeting for at least one, and probably two, years.

This bill solves these problems in two ways: First, it takes a provision from the Governor's budget to require all license plates that are currently issued to be replaced in the next 7 years. The Governor proposed 10 years initially, but after talking to industry experts and the DOT, we have determined that a 7-year replacement time frame makes the most sense, after allowing a 10 year phase-in.

The bill also specifies standards for the sheeting of the license plates to improve its quality. It must be prismatic sheeting with a modern standard of reflectivity and luminance. Based on my conversations with manufacturers, I understand that at least three vendors have sheeting that meets this standard.

Finally, the bill increases the fee for license plate replacement. Under current law, the state currently LOSES at least \$1.25 per license plate. Under the amendment, the fee will be \$4 per plate, to cover the expected costs of the license plate, new sheeting and postage. To be clear, the state will not be profiting from this increased fee, but it will no longer lose money either.

As I just said, the state loses money on each license plate – recovering only about 40% of the license plate cost. We recognize that replacement of license plates will take time and money, and we don't want to drive this line item deeper into deficit. For that reason, the amendment delays the effective date of the replacement schedule until such time as the Joint Finance Committee approves use of the additional license plate fee, or June 30, 2023, whichever comes first. This is a good compromise by not just granting additional revenue to DOT, while also not hamstringing DOT if it doesn't receive approval to use the funds.

Thank you.

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# SHANNON ZIMMERMAN

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 30<sup>th</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

## Assembly Bill 432 Assembly Committee on Transportation November 17, 2021

Thank you Chairman Plumer and committee members for hearing testimony on Assembly Bill 432 today.

Most of you have likely seen illegible license plates on vehicles while out on the roads. These plates pose multiple public safety concerns. They can cause an issue for law enforcement officials who may be attempting to run the plates through their system. In conditions of low visibility, the license plate may be the only reflective item on the automobile. If the reflective sheeting is completely eroded, it may be difficult for pedestrians or other motorists to see the vehicle in low visibility conditions. Ridesharing services also rely on customers confirming the vehicle type and license plate to ensure the safety of the driver as well as the customer. Bus drivers may have a hard time obtaining an accurate license plate from vehicles that illegally pass their vehicle while they are picking up children.

We are proposing AB 432 to assist in ensuring that license plates on vehicles in active use are visible and legible. The bill would require periodic replacement license plates for Wisconsin drivers. Under the bill as amended, replacement would be required every 10 years. There would be an associated fee of \$8 for the replacement plates which would cover the cost of production. The WI DOT currently loses money on the amount charged for replacement plates. The bill would also require that the most current technology be used in the reflective sheeting to improve visibility.

The increased reflectivity and visibility will help law enforcement in their routine daily work, but even more so in emergency situations where time is of the essence. The improved visibility would also be particularly helpful in instances of disabled vehicles on the roadside.

I would like to add that a similar provision was included in Governor Evers' proposed budget. The primary difference is the requirement to use the latest most reflective sheeting in the production of the plates.

Thank you for your time and attention to this legislation.



To: Members, Assembly Committee on Transportation  
From: Badger State Sheriffs' Association (BSSA)  
Wisconsin Sheriffs and Deputy Sheriffs Association (WS&DSA)  
Date: November 17, 2021  
**RE: Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 432**

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Chairman Plumer, members of the Assembly Transportation Committee, my name is Sheriff Dale Schimdt of Dodge County, and I am here today to testify in support of Assembly Bill 432 or the "license plate sheeting" bill.

As way of background, BSSA is a statewide organization representing all of Wisconsin's 72 Sheriffs. WS&DSA is a statewide organization representing over 1,000 members, including Sheriffs, Deputies, and jail officers. BSSA and WS&DSA have a joint legislative committee and work closely on public safety issues of concern to our members.

Our organizations support AB 432 – which will improve the visibility of license plates in Wisconsin. License plates are a very effective tool for law enforcement to help identify vehicles and crime suspects. Law enforcement frequently use the information from license plates to investigate a variety of crimes, including murder, sexual assault, hit-in-run, OWI, drug trafficking, carjacking, and driving with a revoked/suspended license.

Clear, readable plates are a critical tool to ensure public safety. This legislation keeps Wisconsin on track to utilize the most current reflective technology available on the market, promotes more visibility on rural roadways, and assists law enforcement in solving crimes. For these reasons, I ask you to support this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to support this commonsense bill.



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**To:** Chairman Plumer and members of the Committee  
**From:** Joel Nilsestuen, Assistant Deputy Secretary  
**Date:** November 17, 2021  
**RE:** **Assembly Bill 432, relating to Registration Plates**

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Thank you, Chairman Plumer and committee members for the opportunity submit this written testimony. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation's (WisDOT) submits this testimony for informational purposes.

Historically, Wisconsin replaced plates every seven years, then increased it to 10 years in 2005, but dropped the replacement requirement altogether in 2009 due to funding constraints. These previous plate replacements were funded entirely by the state.

While there is no longer a mandatory replacement cycle in our state, Wisconsin Statutes still require motorists to replace their plates at the motorist's expense when they are no longer legible. While "legible" is a subjective term, we have all seen plates on the road whereby the numbers/letters are barely legible, and the reflective sheeting has deteriorated. The status of these plates makes the jobs of law enforcement officers more difficult than necessary when needing to quickly identify vehicle attributes.

Some states have continued to replace plates but pass the fees to the motorist. Michigan recently started reissuance again after no replacements for years and now replace every 10 years. Minnesota replaces plates every seven years, and the fee is included in registration. Illinois replaces plates at no additional cost when the plate becomes defective or at renewal after 10 years. Iowa also replaces after 10 years but passes some costs to the customer. Illinois and Iowa, as is the case with Michigan, started their replacement programs back up in the last few years after not replacing plates for a length of time.

Assembly Bill 432 takes a similar approach by including a plate replacement fee to one's registration renewal when the plate is seven years old. This timeline complies with best practices for plate and sheeting longevity to ensure the plate remains legible.

The Department appreciates the interest that several legislators have shown in this topic and are thankful for the introduction of legislation allowing this discussion today.

While not changing the primary intent of this legislation – replacing plates at the seven-year mark – the Department requires the following amendments to support this bill:

- 1) **Effective Date.** As drafted, this change would take effect on February 1, 2022. The Department requests an extended timeline for issuing new replacement plates to all vehicles exceeding the 7-year upon the effective date. In summary – because there are currently about 3 million plates eligible for a 7-year replacement cycle as of today, WisDOT is asking for a total of 10 years to complete the replacement of all previously issued plates more than 7 years old. This will allow the Department to maintain a more consistent annual delivery volume without an increase in staffing for DMV or Corrections.
- 2) **The fee associated with the production and distribution of license plates.** While the existing draft recognizes a modest increase from current Statutes, postage costs have increased since early discussions and the Department of Corrections' production costs have increased more than 20% since the manufacturing fee was last set 10 years ago. To allow the Departments to “break-even” on these realized cost increases to date, a \$4 per plate replacement fee is recommended, or \$8 for a pair.
- 3) **DMV appropriation required to pay for plates.** While SB 429 creates the mechanism to collect the fees required, DMV needs additional budget authority in its annual appropriation to ensure these fee revenues are available to pay the required costs of manufacturing and delivery.

Everyone here shares in the goal to have legible license plates on the road. With the amendments outlined above, the Department is confident we could begin providing replacement plates across the state. Without this expenditure authority, DMV will not be able to absorb the costs of this program.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our concerns with AB 432. We would be happy to answer any questions you might have.



November 17, 2021

To: Chairman Plumer and Members of the Assembly Committee on Transportation

From: Wisconsin Chiefs of Police Association

Re: Support for Improving License Plate Quality

Chairman Plumer and Members of the Assembly Committee on Transportation, thank you for holding a hearing on Assembly Bill 432, relating to construction and issuance of motor vehicle registration plates.

We would also like to thank Senator Wanggard and Representative Zimmerman for their leadership on this issue. Thank you for your continued support in finding ways to make our communities safer.

The Wisconsin Chiefs of Police Association is proud to support Assembly Bill 432. This change will help Wisconsin improve our license plate quality by utilizing the brightest and most reflective license plate sheeting available on the market.

There are many reasons why license plates are a vital part of assisting our officers in keeping our community's safe. Plates are often the only reflective surface on a vehicle at night, which helps our community members identify parked, stalled, or crashed vehicles. They are also vital for our officers in identifying vehicles potentially involved in a crime, or in Amber or Silver Alert situations.

Many crimes are done with the use of a vehicle. Being able to identify and distinguish vehicles, and their owners, in a quick manner is an important part of our patrol officer's duties. With increased visibility of the license plates, we are better able to do our jobs.

In closing, the Wisconsin Chiefs of Police Association is excited to support Assembly Bill 432. Our departments throughout Wisconsin will benefit from having this change to license plates made.

We respectfully ask you to support Assembly Bill 432.