



Van H. Wanggaard

Wisconsin State Senator

TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 429

Thank you Mr. Chairman and committee members for today's hearing on Senate Bill 429. 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These issues with our license plates are the result of two issues: Poor and outdated license plate sheeting and age of our plates.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 Extending the use of the outdated license plate sheeting for at least one, and probably two, years.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, and I am talking to the Administration about the proper amount of time to replace the existing plates. Going forward, all new plates will be replaced on a 7-year time frame.

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 reflexivity 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. So this bill increases the replacement fee to cover the expected costs of the license plate. To be clear, the state will not be profiting from this increased fee, but it will no longer lose money either.

DOT is here to testify today as well. I am working with them to help address any issues that may arise.

Thank you.

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Senate Bill 429
Senate Committee on Transportation and Local Government
September 7, 2021

Thank you Chairman Petrowski and committee members for hearing testimony on Senate Bill 429 today.

Most of you have likely seen illegible license plates on vehicles while out on the roads. These plates pose multiple public safety concerns. First, they can cause an issue for law enforcement officials who may be attempting to run the plates through their system. Second, 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 to see the vehicle for pedestrians or other motorists. Third, ridesharing services rely on customers confirming the vehicle and license plate to ensure the safety of the driver as well as the customer.

We are proposing Senate Bill 429 to assist in ensuring that license plates on active vehicles are visible and legible. The bill would require periodic replacement of license plates. It would also require that the most current technology is used in the reflective sheeting to improve visibility, especially in low light conditions.

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.

Finally, the safety of rideshare customers would be improved if they are able to easily verify the license plate on the vehicle they are entering matches what is on record on the rideshare app.

Thank you for your time and attention to this legislation and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



September 7, 2021

To: Chairman Petrowski and Members of the Senate Committee on Transportation and Local Government

From: Wisconsin Chiefs of Police Association
Pat Mitchell, President
Aaron Chapin, McFarland Chief of Police

Re: Support for Improving License Plate Quality

Chairman Petrowski and Members of the Senate Committee on Transportation and Local Government, thank you for holding a hearing on Senate Bill 429, 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 Senate Bill 429. 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 Senate Bill 429. Our departments throughout Wisconsin will benefit from having this change to license plates made.

We respectfully ask you to support Senate Bill 429.

We are now available for any questions from the committee.



To: Members, Senate Committee on Transportation
From: Badger State Sheriffs' Association (BSSA)
Wisconsin Sheriffs and Deputy Sheriffs Association (WS&DSA)
Date: September 7, 2021
RE: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 429

Chairman Petrowski, members of the Senate Transportation Committee, my name is Patrol Captain Todd Horn of Columbia County, and I am here today to testify in support of Senate Bill 429 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 SB 429 – 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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Testimony of Wisconsin Department of Transportation
Assistant Deputy Secretary Joel Nilsestuen
Wisconsin State Senate Committee on Transportation and Local Government
Senate Bill 429
September 7, 2021

Thank you, Chairman Petrowski and committee members for the opportunity to speak for information on Senate Bill 429. Today, I am joined by Kristina Boardman who serves as the Administrator for the Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV) and Jim Donlin who serves as the Director of the Bureau of Budget.

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 replaces plates 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, re-started their replacement programs after not replacing plates for a length of time.

Senate Bill 429 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 legislators have shown in this topic and are thankful for the introduction of legislation allowing this conversation today.

While not changing the primary intent of this legislation – replacing plates at the seven-year mark – the Department offers a few suggestions for amendment consideration:

- 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 7-years 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) 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. Without this expenditure authority, DMV will not be able to absorb the costs of this program.

Everyone here shares in the goal to have legible license plates on the road. With a few changes to the current draft, the Department is confident we could begin providing replacement plates across the state. Thank you for your time and consideration of our concerns with SB 429. We are happy to address your questions.