

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2006 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 281 (Delegates Kach and Conroy)
Environmental Matters

Vehicle Laws - Vehicle Registration Plates for Recipients of an Armed Forces Medal - Surviving Spouse

This bill requires the surviving spouse of a deceased holder of a special registration for recipient of a combat-related, armed services medal to surrender the rear registration plate to the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) upon expiration of the registration. The spouse may keep the front registration plate, but may not display it on a vehicle.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. The bill codifies existing practice.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: A recipient of a combat-related, individually earned armed services medal may apply to the MVA for special registration plates for a Class A (passenger) vehicle, a Class E (truck) vehicle with one ton of capacity or less, a Class M (multipurpose) vehicle, or a Class D (motorcycle) vehicle. The applicant must provide proof of the receipt of the medal, and proof of an honorable discharge from the armed services, if the applicant has separated. The applicant must pay an additional fee for the registration plates. The registration plates must depict an emblem or logo that depicts the medal. The MVA may set an additional registration fee for medal plates to recover costs.

That fee is not credited to the Gasoline and Motor Vehicle Revenue Account; as such, it is not shared with local governments.

Background: Almost all states have some kind of registration plate specifically for veterans who have received some kind of combat award; different types of awards include the Bronze Star, the Silver Star, the Congressional Medal of Honor, the Combat Infantry Ribbon, the Distinguished Flying Cross, Distinguished Service Cross, the Navy Cross, and the Purple Heart. Many states also offer special registration plates for veterans of various wars such as Vietnam, Korea, World War II, disabled veterans, former prisoners of war, and Pearl Harbor. For example:

- Maine provides decals for all five branches of the Armed Services (Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard), as well as (among others) decals for the Coast Guard Medal, the Silver Star, the Air Force Cross, the Soldier's Medal, the Navy Marine Medal, the Airman's Medal, the Kosovo campaign, and the war on Terrorism (Iraq and Afghanistan);
- Idaho offers plates for all veterans, and specialized plates for disabled veterans, recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor, former prisoners of war, Pearl Harbor survivors, the Purple Heart, and military reservists and members of the National Guard;
- Texas offers license plates for (among others): members of the U.S. Army Airborne Parachutists, Desert Storm veterans, Distinguished Flying Cross Medals, Gold Star Mothers, the Texas Guard, and all branches of the Armed Services; and
- North Carolina offers plates for Veterans of Foreign Wars; the 82nd Airborne; retired military; and Vietnam, Korea, and World War II veterans, as well as for recipients of the Bronze Star, Legion of Valor, Distinguished Flying Cross, and Congressional Medal of Honor.

At least three states (Texas, Arizona, and Mississippi) have passed legislation specifically authorizing widows and widowers of recipients of these special plates to keep them as a valid registration for use on a vehicle.

The MVA advises that while it requires a surviving spouse to surrender the registration upon expiration after the death of the recipient, it does allow the surviving spouse as an unofficial policy to keep the front registration plate as a keepsake. The spouse must request the plate at an MVA office, and the front plate is marked as lost in the computer. The MVA advises that as of August 2004, there were 3,357 active combat medal registrations; in addition, in fiscal 2005 there were 5 registrations issued.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maine Bureau of Motor Vehicles, Idaho Department of Motor Vehicles, Texas Department of Transportation, North Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles, Maryland Department of Transportation, Department of Legislative Services

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