

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 352

(Senator Charles)

Judicial Proceedings

Motor Vehicles - Special Registration Plates - Old Line Plates (Old Line Plate Program Act of 2026)

This bill requires the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) to develop and make available an Old Line Plate for certain vehicles. An Old Line Plate must resemble the registration plate issued by the State for display on a motor vehicle in 1911 (*i.e.*, white characters on a black background). The bill establishes numerous requirements and limitations related to the issuance, through auction, and transfer of such plates. Fees collected pursuant to the bill's authorization must be (1) used to recover MVA's costs and (2) credited to the Transportation Trust Fund (TTF). MVA must adopt regulations to implement the bill. MVA must conduct the first auction by December 1, 2026.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: TTF revenues increase, potentially significantly, beginning in FY 2027 due to fee revenues from the new registration plate program, as discussed below. TTF expenditures increase beginning in FY 2027 for MVA to produce the new special registration plates and to hold auctions, as discussed below.

Local Effect: The bill does not materially affect local government finances or operations.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The bill applies to the following types of vehicles: Class A (passenger); Class E (truck) with a maximum gross vehicle weight of 10,000 pounds or less; Class M (multipurpose); or any other class of vehicle that MVA designates by regulation.

“Old Line Plate” means a registration plate issued under the bill bearing an Old Line Number. “Old Line Number” means a numeric-only vehicle registration number consisting of one to five digits, without letters, punctuation, or leading zeros. A “registration number right” means a revocable, transferable authorization issued by MVA to have a particular Old Line Number assigned to the registration of a qualifying vehicle.

Old Line Plates

MVA must develop and make available for qualifying vehicles an Old Line Plate; however, the State must retain ownership of all Old Line Plates, and the holder of such a plate does not have a property interest in the plate.

MVA must maintain an inventory of unassigned Old Line Numbers. Generally, MVA may not reassign an active numeric-only vehicle registration number to be an Old Line Number. However, on request of a holder of an active numeric-only vehicle registration number (and payment of the applicable transfer fee), MVA must (1) issue the holder a registration number right and (2) exchange the individual’s current registration plate with an Old Line Plate bearing the holder’s current registration number.

MVA must (1) establish and operate a public auction program to award registration number rights in Old Line Numbers and (2) adopt reserve prices, bid increments, bidder qualifications, and offer number categories. An auction must be live, online, or by sealed bid and must be conducted periodically or on a rolling basis.

Transfer Provisions

MVA may transfer a registration number right and issue a new, identical Old Line Plate to another vehicle registrant on application and payment of a transfer fee (as determined by MVA). However, a registration right may not be transferred within 180 days after its initial issuance or most recent transfer. Only one transfer of a single registration number right may occur during any 12-month period unless the transfer meets specified criteria (*e.g.*, is to or from the estate of a deceased holder, is to a spouse, domestic partner, parent, child, or sibling of the holder of the right, etc.).

Generally, a registration number right for an Old Line Number not assigned to a qualifying vehicle for 12 consecutive months must revert to MVA 60 days after written notice is sent to the registrant’s last address on file. However, for good cause shown, MVA may authorize a one-time delay on reversion of a registration number right for up to 12 months.

Enforcement and Reversion of Number

MVA may deny, suspend, or revoke (1) a registration number right for fraud or misuse, nonpayment of required fees, or a violation of the bill (or related regulations) or (2) a transfer, if the transfer is determined to be for the purpose of evading the requirements noted above.

Upon revocation or surrender of a registration number right, the right must revert to MVA and the number may be re-auctioned.

Current Law: Special registration plates, which include an unusual feature such as an emblem or logo depicting an organization, are available for eligible vehicles with payment of an additional fee. Special registration plates are also transferable in some instances. MVA issues several types of special commemorative geographical, historical, natural resource, and environmental registration plates (such as the Chesapeake Bay and Maryland agriculture plates), as well as numerous organizational registration plates.

MVA also currently offers 1910 Vintage Reproduction registration plates, which consist of black lettering on a yellow background.

State Revenues: TTF revenues increase as MVA collects the fees authorized by the bill for the Old Line Plate program. However, the ultimate impact depends on the number of vehicle owners who participate in each auction to obtain an Old Line Plate, and the price they are willing to pay, which is unknown and cannot be determined without experience under the bill. MVA advises that approximately 4.4 million vehicles are eligible for the special registration plate established by the bill.

For illustrative purposes only, if 1,000 owners of vehicles obtain an Old Line Plate each year and pay an average final auction price of \$275 per set of plates, TTF revenues would increase by \$275,000 annually. Under this scenario, total revenues for TTF from auction fees over the five-year period would be approximately \$1.4 million.

State Expenditures: TTF expenditures increase for costs related to the production of the Old Line Plates and for MVA to hold auctions to issue the plates. However, the ultimate fiscal impact depends on the number of plates issued each year and how many auctions are held through the program to issues those plates, which cannot be determined without experience under the bill.

For illustrative purposes only, MVA estimates the cost to produce each set of registration plates totals about \$10 and, thus, under the illustrative example discussed above, TTF expenditures for plate production would increase by \$10,000 annually. Additionally, MVA assumes the cost to hold an auction is approximately \$27,500.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: HB 68 (Delegate Stewart) - Environment and Transportation.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of Transportation; Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 2, 2026
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