

Submitted Testimony on Maine LD 1559 / HP 1075
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Sirs;

I am the Chief Patrol Agent for the U.S. Border Patrol's Houlton Sector, which covers the entire State of Maine. The U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) is a Federal law enforcement agency within U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), a component of the Department of Homeland Security. The USBP's mission is to protect America by securing the international border and conducting law enforcement operations between the official Ports of Entry (POEs), which are staffed by our sister agency, the Office of Field Operations, or OFO. USBP Houlton Sector is responsible for 611 miles of the international boundary with Canada along Maine's land and river borders. Houlton Sector's Border Patrol Agents are also peace officers in the State of Maine, a result of the significant amount of assistance provided to State and local law enforcement agencies in the primarily rural areas in which we operate, which have limited State or local law enforcement resources. Border Patrol agents are often first responders to State and local crimes when needed.

This message is in regards to LD 1559 / HP 1075, An Act to Remove the Law Mandating a Front License Plate. Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on this proposed legislation. I have attached a study completed by the Texas A&M Traffic Institute which outlines many of the concerns of law enforcement regarding this issue, and with which USBP Houlton Sector is in agreement.

The usual pros of going to one plate includes potential cost savings, and concerns for aesthetics.

The list of cons is much more extensive and includes information outlined in the Study, as well as data further expounding the U.S. Border Patrol, Houlton Sector's perspective:

- Houlton Sector Border Patrol agents must make split second decisions based upon the information that they have in front of them. While on routine patrol agents may encounter port runners, vehicles being utilized in smuggling attempts or other criminal activity, lookouts, etc. Agents need to be able to identify a vehicle's registration while traveling in the opposite direction as the target vehicle. This helps the agent identify a specific vehicle, which can determine if a vehicle stop will be made or not. There is no such thing as a routine vehicle stop, and immediate vehicle identification helps to optimize officer safety. Agents responding to various events (i.e. port runners, sensor activations, citizen reports, other agency lookouts and calls for assistance) use the front Maine license plate to eliminate legitimate travelers operating a vehicle with a matching description of the target without wasting valuable response time turning around on it. For example, a POE calls out a Canadian plated vehicle running or bypassing the port. With reasonable accuracy, an agent can eliminate vehicles with a front Maine license plate from suspicion even if the vehicle is similar in description to the vehicle fleeing the POE, thus saving limited agent resources and time to locate the actual violator. An agent needing verification of a registration may radio ahead to another unit to observe the front plate for the registration and identification of the vehicle.

- In Maine's northern climate, a vehicle's rear plate is often covered by snow, in rural areas the rear plate is often further obscured by road grime, concealing the registration, which also factors in to the scenarios outlined in the previous bullet. Additionally, this causes issues/delays at the international border when OFO's Automated License Plate Readers or CBP Officers are unable to correctly read the rear mounted license plate(s). The inability to accurately read license plates has the potential to cause delays at the POE, which adversely affects the facilitation of lawful trade and travel as efficiently, and safely, as possible. CBP's concerns regarding one license plate are explained in more detail in the attached Study.
- Criminals do not always swap out both plates on stolen vehicles or vehicles involved in criminal activity. Conflicting front and rear plates leads to greater reasonable suspicion of illegal activity and more effective resolution of that activity.
- For emphasis, as noted in the Study, agencies equipped with license plate readers have a greater ability to locate a vehicle based on the license plate information.
- Any extra ability for an agent or any law enforcement officer to obtain critical information on a motor vehicle involved in an incident is paramount to the successful resolution of the incident.
- With the remote surveillance technology used by USBP Houlton Sector, agents may only have photographs or video of the front of a vehicle. The front plate allows for easier and more accurate identification of vehicles involved in, and investigation of suspicious activity.

In conclusion: From a Homeland/National security and law enforcement perspective, the enactment of this legislation would be detrimental to the Border Patrol's effectiveness and efficiency in the conduct of its mission in the State of Maine. The U.S. Border Patrol Houlton Sector recommends that the State of Maine not enact the legislation proposing one license plate, instead of two, based upon the reasons outlined above. These reasons greatly outweigh the potential for minimal cost savings and vehicle aesthetics concerns.

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