



## Colorado License Plates

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Do you prefer green mountains and white text or white mountains and green text? Whether or not we all agree with the color choices for Colorado's license plates, every vehicle on the roads is required to have one. This *issue brief* discusses license plate laws and regulations in Colorado.

### Background

In Colorado, every registered vehicle owner is issued two numbered license plates.<sup>1</sup> Only motorcycles, street rod vehicles, trailers or semitrailers, vehicles drawn by a motor vehicle, or items of special mobile machinery are issued a single numbered license plate. With an exception for personalized plates, license plates are limited to a total of six numbers and letters. Owners must affix license plates to both the front and rear of the vehicle. Failure to display two license plates results in a class B traffic infraction (\$15 - \$100 fine). The rear license plate is also required to have two valid tags indicating the year and month when the vehicle's registration expires. Failure to display valid tags also results in a class B traffic infraction.

The Colorado Department of Revenue's (DOR) Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV) administers license plates in conjunction with the counties. In 40 states, including Colorado, license plates are registered to the vehicle owner, not the vehicle itself. In practice, this means that when a vehicle is sold, the previous owner either transfers the license plate to a newly purchased vehicle or surrenders the license plates to the DMV.

### License Plate Funds

Current law states that each owner issued a license plate shall pay a fee to cover the direct cost of the plates.<sup>2</sup> These fees are limited to the amount necessary to recover the costs of the production and distribution of license plates. The state treasurer deposits fee revenue in the License Plate Cash Fund. Money in the fund is appropriated for the direct costs incurred by DOR to purchase license plates, decals, and validating tags from the Department of Corrections and for issuing license plates. In addition, \$2 from every personalized license plate fee is remitted to the issuing county's general fund.<sup>3</sup>

*One-time group special license plate fees.* Colorado law requires an additional one-time, \$25 fee to be levied on most group special license plates. The proceeds of this fee are allocated to the state Highway Users Tax Fund.

### Colorado License Plates

While Colorado's standard white mountains and green text license plate accounts for about 80 percent<sup>4</sup> of all license plates in Colorado, the DMV also offers over 125 additional license plate types, including: military, alumni, and group special license plates.

*Group special license plates.* Current law states that group special license plates may only be created for nonprofit entities. Before seeking legislation authorizing a new group special license

<sup>1</sup>Section 42-3-201, C.R.S.

<sup>2</sup>Section 42-3-301, C.R.S.

<sup>3</sup>Section 42-3-211 (7), C.R.S.

<sup>4</sup>Report of Registered Vehicles by Plate Type, Colorado Department of Revenue, <http://www.colorado.gov/pacific/dmv/vehicles>, accessed on February 21, 2018.

plate, supporters must receive an approval notification from DOR and collect 3,000 signatures from Colorado registered vehicle owners. The approval notification application process is governed by DOR regulations.<sup>5</sup> The application includes: 3,000 signatures; proof of nonprofit status, a sample certificate issued to the nonprofit as evidence that the group meets the qualifications for group special license plates; a logo permission letter; a payment to Colorado Correctional Industries (CCi) prior to manufacturing; and organizational documents. Once the application is received and approved, the approval is valid for two years from the date of submission and supporters may seek legislation creating a group special license plate.

Colorado has group special license plates for a wide variety of causes, such as Breast Cancer Awareness, Girl Scouts, and State Parks. In addition to the one-time issuance fee, 23 of the 46 group special license plates in circulation require a donation to the sponsoring nonprofit.

**Alumni license plates.** Colorado offers 13 alumni license plates for Colorado institutions of higher education. Most of the plates require a donation to the institution's scholarship program and/or for the vehicle owner to be a member of the institution's alumni association to qualify for a plate. All alumni plates require payment of a \$50 one-time fee upon issuance of the plates.

**Military license plates.** Colorado offers 38 military license plates. Several of the military license plates, such as prisoner of war and disabled veteran license plates, are exempt from the one-time \$25 plate issuance fee.

**Persons with disabilities.** The DMV offers several license plates for persons with disabilities, allowing individuals to park their vehicle or a vehicle in which they are a passenger in designated

disability parking spaces. The DMV offers three license plates for persons with disabilities: a three-year identifying plate; a permanent identifying plate; and a military license plate. Persons wanting to obtain this plate must fill out DMV Form DR2219.<sup>6</sup>

**Personalized license plates.** Personalized license plates are plates where the owner of the vehicle requested the plate number.<sup>7</sup> Personalized license plates must be between two and seven numbers and/or letters. Colorado law allows the DMV to refuse to issue any combination of letters or numbers that are misleading, carry connotations offensive to good taste and decency, or duplicate any other license plate. A one-time \$35 fee is due upon issuance of the license plates, with a subsequent annual registration fee of \$25 for the plates. In addition, there is a \$12 fee to transfer personalized plates from one vehicle to another.

**Other license plates.** Examples of other license plates issued by the DMV include: collector; commercial fleet; dealer; farm; government; horseless carriage; livery; political; street rod; taxicab; and tow truck. Qualification criteria, registration, and fees differ for each of these plates.

**Temporary tags.** Senate Bill 15-090 changed the look and placement of temporary license plates so that they meet the same criteria as permanent plates regarding attachment, visibility, and readability.<sup>8</sup> Temporary tags are only valid for 60 days.

**Online resources.** For more information about motor vehicles in Colorado, see Legislative Council Staff's Motor Vehicle Law Resource Book at <http://leg.colorado.gov/content/colorado-motor-vehicle-law-resource-book>.

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<sup>5</sup>1 CCR 204-10 (16)

<sup>6</sup><http://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/DR2219.pdf>, accessed on February 21, 2018.

<sup>7</sup>Section 42-3-211, C.R.S.

<sup>8</sup><http://www.colorado.gov/pacific/dmv/senate-bill-15-090-temporary-registration-document-standards> accessed on February 21, 2018.