

---

CONSENT

---

Bill No: AB 1085  
Author: Stefani (D)  
Amended: 6/11/25 in Senate  
Vote: 21

---

SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE: 13-0, 6/10/25  
AYES: Cortese, Strickland, Arreguín, Blakespear, Cervantes, Dahle, Grayson,  
Limón, Menjivar, Richardson, Seyarto, Umberg, Valladares  
NO VOTE RECORDED: Archuleta, Gonzalez

SENATE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE: 6-0, 7/1/25  
AYES: Arreguín, Seyarto, Caballero, Gonzalez, Pérez, Wiener

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: Senate Rule 28.8

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 69-0, 5/15/25 (Consent) - See last page for vote

---

**SUBJECT:** License plates: obstruction or alteration

**SOURCE:** Streets for All

---

**DIGEST:** This bill makes it an infraction to manufacture in California a product or device that obscures, or is intended to obscure, a license plate by visual or electronic means and strengthens penalties against those who sell these products.

**ANALYSIS:**

Existing law:

- 1) Requires license plates to be mounted so as to be clearly visible and legible, as specified. (Vehicle Code (VEH) § 5201)
- 2) Prohibits a person from erasing the reflective coating of, painting over the reflective coating of, or altering a license plate only if it's to avoid visual or electronic capture of the license plate or its characters. (VEH § 5202.1)

- 3) Prohibits the sale of a product or device that obscures, or is intended to obscure, the reading or recognition of a license plate by visual means, or by an electronic device operated in connection with a toll road, high-occupancy toll lane, toll bridge or other toll facility and prohibits a person from operating a vehicle with such a product. (VEH § 5202.1)
- 4) Makes the above described violations an infraction punishable with a base fine of \$250 (\$1,105 after additional penalty assessments are added by the courts). (VEH § 5202.1)
- 5) Requires a license plate to be securely fastened to the front and back of a vehicle for which they are issued in a manner that is clearly visible. (VEH § 5201)
- 6) Prohibits the covering of a license plate except for a cover over a lawfully parked vehicle to protect it from the weather and the elements or a security cover so long as the device does not obstruct or impair the recognition of the license plate. (VEH § 5201)

This bill:

- 1) Makes it a fine of \$1,000 to manufacture or sell a product or device in California that obscures, or is intended to obscure, the reading or recognition of a license plate by visual means.
- 2) Prohibits the use of a shade or tint that obstructs or impairs the reading or recognition of a license plate by an electronic device operated by state or local law enforcement, an electronic device operated in connection with a toll road, high-occupancy toll lane, toll bridge, or other toll facility.

## Comments

- 1) *Purpose of this bill.* According to the author, “Illegal license plate covers, designed to purposefully obscure plates, are making it easier for bad actors to evade accountability. These tinted or shaded covers have been linked to vehicle thefts and robberies, preventing law enforcement from identifying and stopping offenders. They also allow drivers to dodge toll payments, costing the state’s transportation system millions of lost revenue each year- undermining automated enforcement programs and diverting critical funding from road maintenance and improvements. AB 1085 strengthens existing laws by further clarifying which license plate covers are illegal and increasing penalties for manufacturers and sellers who enable their use. When drivers purposefully hide

their plates, they aren't just breaking the law- they're shifting financial burdens onto our toll agencies and putting public safety at risk."

- 2) *License plate readers.* State and local jurisdictions use automated license plate reader cameras to collect tolls, enforce express lane requirements, issue red light violations, issue parking violations in bus stops, and now to enforce speed limits, among other purposes. Additionally, law enforcement agencies use automated license plate reader (ALPR) systems to rapidly identify and locate vehicles of interest to law enforcement. In one common use of ALPR technology, license plate encounters are compared against law enforcement databases, also known as "hot lists". The lists contain the license plate numbers and letters of vehicles associated with active investigations, such as those related to Amber Alerts or other missing persons, stolen vehicles, or stolen license plates.
- 3) *Obstructed license plates.* There are a variety of products available for purchase that obstruct license plates from camera enforcement. License plate covers, for example, include mechanical devices to cover the plate or, in less obvious cases, they can be a clear layer of prismatic or glass material that makes the plate unreadable in a photograph. Consumers can buy a spray branded as "PhotoBlocker" which is applied to the license plate. It produces a glossy finish strong enough to reflect light back into the camera and obfuscate the plate. License plate "flippers" allow a driver to flip the plate when approaching a camera. Some "smart license plates" are equipped with sensors that detect a camera's flash and obstruct the plate with a flash of its own. Many of these products and devices are easily available online—including some from major retailers.

Currently, it is illegal to use a device in California that obstructs or impairs the reading or recognition of a license plate by an electronic device operated by law enforcement or a toll authority. Sellers of these devices argue that the products serve a number of purposes, such as for the user's privacy or to keep a plate clean. However, they are most frequently associated with evasion of automated license plate readers.

According to the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, the Bay Area Toll authority, "lost an estimated \$5.8 million in fiscal year 2023-24 because approximately 780,000 license plates were blocked or distorted, meaning electronic toll readers were unable to capture the plates. Of that total, an estimated 24% – or \$1.4 million – was due to plate covers, tints, or other

obstructions targeted in this bill. The remaining cases were due to license plate alterations (e.g., duct tape over a digit) or physical obstructions like bike racks or tow balls.”

- 4) *Enforcement.* The California Highway Patrol shared the department’s citation data related to license plate obstruction for the last three years, indicating that enforcement against these offenses has increased:

	2022	2023	2024
Plate covering	1,742	535	227
Plate obstruction	2,473	1,186	380
Selling a product to obstruct plate	3,847	1,294	687

This bill expands the prohibition on selling or using a license plate-obstructing device to include manufacturing these products in California. While it is reasonable to extend the same penalty faced by sellers to manufactures, it is unclear to what extent these products are actually manufactured in California.

- 5) *Increased penalties.* The current base fine for the sale of a prohibited product or device to obstruct or impair reading or recognition of a license plate is \$250. With court penalties and fees added, this fine amounts to \$1,101. This bill establishes a \$1,000 base fine for manufacturing one of these products. With penalties and fees added, however, the total payment owed if the court imposed the maximum fine of \$1,000 would be \$4,140 per item sold or manufactured.

### **Related/Prior Legislation**

AB 2111 (Wallis, Chapter 59, Statutes of 2024) – Made it an infraction to alter or cover a license plate for any reason.

SB 712 (Anderson, 2017) – Would have allowed cars to use a license plate cover when parked. This bill died on the Senate Floor.

AB 2489 (Hall, Chapter 702, Statutes of 2012) – Made it an infraction to alter or cover a license plate in order to avoid law enforcement reading the license plate with a camera.

AB 801 (Walters, Chapter 273, Statutes of 2008) – Made it an infraction to sell a product or device that obscures, or is intended to obscure, the reading or recognition of a license plate.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Appropriation: No   Fiscal Com.: Yes   Local: Yes

**SUPPORT:** (Verified 7/15/25)

Streets for All (Source)

Active San Gabriel Valley

Arcadia Police Officers' Association

Bike Culver City

Bike Long Beach

Brea Police Association

Burbank Police Officers' Association

Calbike

California Association of School Police Chiefs

California Coalition of School Safety Professionals

California Narcotic Officers' Association

California Reserve Peace Officers Association

Car-lite Long Beach

Circulate San Diego

City/county Association of Governments of San Mateo County

Claremont Police Officers Association

Corona Police Officers Association

Costa Mesa Alliance for Better Streets

Culver City Police Officers' Association

East Bay for Everyone

Families for Safe Streets San Diego

Flock Safety

Fullerton Police Officers' Association

Glendale Yimby

Golden Gate Bridge, Highway & Transportation District

League of California Cities

Los Angeles School Police Management Association

Los Angeles School Police Officers Association

Los Angeles Walks

Metropolitan Transportation Commission

Move La, a Project of Community Partners

Murrieta Police Officers' Association

Napa County Bicycle Coalition (napa Bike)

Newport Beach Police Association

Norwalk Unides

Palos Verdes Police Officers Association

Placer County Deputy Sheriffs' Association

Pomona Police Officers' Association  
Remake Irvine Streets for Everyone  
Ridesd  
Riverside Police Officers Association  
Riverside Sheriffs' Association  
San Diego County Bicycle Coalition  
San Francisco Bay Area Families for Safe Streets  
San Francisco Bicycle Coalition  
Santa Ana Police Officers Association  
Stop4aidan  
Street Racing Kills  
Streets are for Everyone  
Strong Towns Artesia  
Strong Towns Santa Barbara  
Walk San Francisco

**OPPOSITION:** (Verified 7/15/25)

None received

**ASSEMBLY FLOOR:** 69-0, 5/15/25

**AYES:** Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alvarez, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Carrillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

**NO VOTE RECORDED:** Alanis, Arambula, Bennett, Caloza, Castillo, Jeff Gonzalez, Hart, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Stefani

Prepared by: Isabelle LaSalle / TRANS. / (916) 651-4121  
7/16/25 16:22:47

\*\*\*\* **END** \*\*\*\*