

generated. The net revenues derived from a specialized license plate are then available upon appropriation for the sponsoring state agency to spend exclusively on projects and programs that promote the state agency's official policy, mission, or work. (VEH 5157)

- 3) Establishes the CAC composed of an 11 member Board, with one member appointed by the Speaker of the Assembly, one member appointed by the Senate Rules Committee, and nine members appointed by the Governor. (GOV 8751)
- 4) Tasks the CAC with, among other things, encouraging artistic awareness, participation, and expression; providing for the exhibition of art works in public buildings; and awarding prizes or grants to individuals and organizations. (GOV 8753)

This bill:

- 1) Requires CAC to apply to DMV to sponsor "The Lowrider" specialized license plate.
- 2) Requires DMV, in consultation with CAC, to design the Lowrider License Plate and that the plate shall reflect lowrider culture and heritage.
- 3) Specifies that CAC, in designing the Lowrider Plate, may consult with a nonprofit entity which supports the lowrider community and Latino culture, and that CAC may use donated artwork from California artists.
- 4) Authorizes CAC to use funds from nonprofit or private sources to augment implementation.
- 5) Requires DMV, in consultation with the California Highway Patrol (CHP), to determine whether the design obscures the readability of the license plate.
- 6) Designates the proceeds of the plate, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to fund projects related to the purpose of supporting lowrider arts, cultural preservation efforts, youth engagement programs, public exhibitions, community-based cultural events, and educational initiatives that celebrate and preserve the history and cultural contributions of lowrider communities in California.

- 7) Specifies that CAC shall prioritize nonprofit entities with a mission of supporting the lowrider community and Latino culture.
- 8) Authorizes CAC to allow a nonprofit entity to assist in the review and administration of these grants.
- 9) Make various findings and declarations about the cultural significance of lowriders.

COMMENTS:

- 1) *Purpose of the bill.* According to the author, “To continue California’s legacy in celebrating diversity, honoring impact, and uplifting communities, AB 2541 will signal another wave of support for the lowrider community, all while bolstering arts programs across the state! This current federal administration is spreading hate and vitriol. The Lowrider License Plate Program is a visible symbol of cultural pride, heritage, and resilience. Together, the legislature can ensure that this modern symbol of resistance keeps rolling forward—cruising through our streets for generations to come.”
- 2) *Lowrider history in California.* Lowriders are customized cars with a lowered body often painted in colorful designs and fitted with hydraulics to allow height adjustable suspension. Lowriders are displayed in events involving cars slowly moving down a street in a repetitive manner, referred to as cruising. The practice is rooted in postwar Southern California, where Chicanos turned to driving and car customization as an art form and means of community organizing. Indeed, cruising is often a social activity, encouraging groups of owners to gather, show their pride in their vehicles, enjoy the sights of a thoroughfare, and develop local community.

Despite the general popularity for cruising among Chicano communities, others began associating cruising with gang violence or disruptions to traffic and business. Cities across California began to enact bans on cruising starting in the 1970s during the oil embargo. In 1974, Los Angeles started taking actions against cruising by banning parking on the San Fernando Valley’s Van Nuys Boulevard and turning it into a one-way street. In 1982, the California Legislature authorized any city in the state to pass an ordinance prohibiting cruising, after which several more local communities enacted bans on lowriding.

In more recent years, lowriding groups began making the case that these initial bans were discriminatory, targeting a cultural practice and not actually

improving safety. Businesses along roadways that used to be frequented by cruising also raised concerns about loss of traffic to their businesses caused by the bans. Starting in 2022, many cities such as Sacramento and San Jose began lifting their bans. This culminated in 2023 with the passage of AB 436 (Alvarez, Chapter 803, Statutes of 2023) which repealed the prohibition on cruising and removed the authorization for local jurisdictions to regulate cruising.

According to Brown Issues, the sponsors of AB 2541, “For decades, California imposed fines, restrictions, and local anti-cruising ordinances that targeted the lowrider community. These policies criminalized cultural expression and attempted to suppress a movement rooted in identity, creativity, and community pride...At a moment when diverse communities across the state continue to confront cultural erasure and political division, AB 2541 offers a positive and unifying path forward. Establishing the Lowrider Specialized License Plate affirms California’s commitment to celebrating cultural traditions rooted in resilience and ensuring they continue to thrive.”

- 3) *California Arts Council*. CAC was established by the Legislature with the mission of “strengthening arts, culture, and creative expression as the tools to cultivate a better California for all.” To carry out this mission, CAC runs various arts and culture programs, maintains a database of arts jobs and artists opportunities, produces reports on arts and culture issues, offers public workshops, and runs a competitive grant program to support California artists. Indeed, CAC is the state’s only public art grants provider, having awarded over \$400 million since their creation.

Currently, CAC is the sponsor of the California Arts specialized license plate. According to DMV, this has been one of the most successful specialized license plates. In 2024, the plate brought in nearly \$1.3 million in revenue and funded \$900,000 in expenditures through CAC. However, according to CAC this still makes up a small percentage of their overall operating budget.

- 4) *Specialized license plates*. Specialized license plates allow drivers the opportunity to support causes or organizations they care about by contributing money and displaying a license plate with a specialized design advertising the cause. In addition to the regular fees for vehicle registration, existing law requires payment of the following fees for the issuance, renewal, or transfer of the specialized license plate: \$50 for original issuance; \$40 for renewal; \$15 for transfer to another vehicle; and \$35 for substitute replacement plates. Once a specialized license plate program has been implemented, all additional fee revenues associated with the plate, after subtracting DMV administrative costs,

are deposited into the Specialized License Plate Fund, and made available to the sponsoring agency upon appropriation by the Legislature for projects and programs that promote the agency's official policy, mission, or work.

Prior to 2007, any new specialized license plate required specific legislative authorization. This practice was held to be unconstitutional by the courts in that the Legislature approved some of the plates, and rejected others, using no standardized or objective criteria for those decisions. In response to these legal challenges, AB 84 (Leslie, Chapter 454, Statutes of 2006) restricted DMV to only issue specialized license plates if they were sponsored by a state agency that received 7,500 commitments from individuals to purchase the plates. This number was chosen as the fees generated from 7,500 plates are sufficient to ensure enough funds to reimburse DMV for the costs of adding a new plate. Thus, without meeting the 7,500 commitment threshold, these specialized plates would not serve their purpose of raising additional revenue for the state. The applications must be collected within one year, with an option to extend that timeframe by an additional year under specified conditions. Additionally, the new specialized license plate must have a design or contain a message that publicizes or promotes a state agency, or the official policy, mission, or work of the agency.

- 5) *Challenges of specialized license plates.* Historically, legislatively mandated specialized license plates have generally proven ineffective. Since 2014, more than 25 specialized plates have been introduced. Of this number more than half have been held in an Appropriations Committees, only four have been signed into law, and only one has met the 7,500 commitment threshold.

In general, the 7,500 commitment threshold has proven to be an insurmountable barrier for the vast majority of pending specialized license plates, even those for ostensibly important or non-controversial causes. For example, in 2014 the Legislature passed, and the Governor signed AB 2321 (Gomez, Chapter 358, Statutes of 2014). The bill directed the Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) to establish a special-interest license plate that promoted awareness of domestic violence and sexual assault. However, CalOES reported that only around 100 commitments were made to purchase the license plates, far below the 7,500 threshold. Thus, the commitments had to be refunded.

Based on these previous examples, it is therefore uncertain if the Lowrider Plate would be able to reach this threshold. Furthermore, if it does reach the threshold, it is uncertain how much revenue it would be able to generate. Given the implementation costs and small revenues involved, the program could be

net revenue negative for CAC.

- 6) *A bill is not necessary.* Creating a new specialized license plate does not require legislation. Members of the Legislature or private individuals can ask state agencies to sponsor a new plate. If there is a plan in place to get to the 7,500 prepaid commitments, an agency may be willing to sponsor a plate if it would result in additional revenue for that agency. DMV additionally provides an informational packet to state agencies on how to sponsor a plate.

RELATED/PREVIOUS LEGISLATION:

SB 1018 (Grove, 2026) – Would have established the survivors of human trafficking grant program administered by the Office of Emergency Services (OES) to benefit survivors of human trafficking and would require OES to apply to DMV to sponsor a human trafficking awareness license plate program. *This bill was held in Senate Appropriations Committee.*

AB 1059 (Garcia, 2025) – Would have required DMV to establish the Blackout License Plate Program and create and issue a series of specialized license plates, known as California Blackout Plates, that have a black background with white lettering. *This bill was held in Assembly Appropriations Committee.*

AB 436 (Alvarez, Chapter 803, Statutes of 2023) – Repealed the prohibition on cruising and removed the authorization for local jurisdictions to regulate cruising.

ACR 176 (Luz Rivas, Chapter 161, Statutes of 2022) – Celebrated the history and culture of cruising and encouraged local officials and law enforcement to work with local car clubs to conduct safe cruising events.

SB 21 (Glazer, 2020) – Would have required the State Department of Education to apply to DMV to sponsor a mental health awareness license plate with proceeds used by the Department of Education for mental health services in public schools. *This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.*

SB 1027 (Stern, 2020) – Would have required the State Coastal Conservancy (SCC) to apply to DMV to sponsor the “Endless Summer” license plate and allocates the proceeds towards project and programs that promote surfing. *This bill was held in the Senate Transportation Committee.*

SB 509 (Portantino, 2019) – Would have required the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) to apply to DMV to sponsor a housing crisis awareness specialized license plate program, with the fees going to support an

existing program for owner-occupied workforce housing. *This bill was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.*

SB 593 (Umberg, 2019) – Would have required the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) to apply to DMV to sponsor a professional sports franchise license plate with the net proceeds going to the Challenged Athletes Foundation. *This bill was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.*

AB 2058 (Acosta, 2018) – Would have authorized DMV to issue personalized Gold Star Family specialized license plates. *This bill was vetoed by the Governor.*

AB 2321 (Gomez, Chapter 358, Statutes of 2014) – Required CalOES to apply to DMV to sponsor a domestic violence and sexual assault awareness license plate program and established the California Domestic Violence Prevention Fund in the State Treasury for the deposit of the revenue derived from these license plates.

AB 84 (Leslie, Chapter 454, Statutes of 2006) – Restricted specialized license plates to only be issued if sponsored by a state agency that receives 7,500 commitments from individuals to purchase the plates.

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

POSITIONS: (Communicated to the committee before noon on Wednesday, June 24, 2026.)

SUPPORT:

Brown Issues (Sponsor)
Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA)

OPPOSITION:

None received

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