



sponsoring state agency to expend exclusively on projects and programs that promote the state agency's official policy, mission, or work.

**This bill:**

- 1) Requires CalOES to apply to DMV to sponsor a human trafficking awareness license plate with proceeds used by CalOES for the purpose of funding a survivors of human trafficking grant program.
- 2) Requires DMV to accept donations to the Survivors of Human Trafficking License Plate Fund on its internet website without requiring the purchase of a specialized license plate.
- 3) Establishes a grant program for the benefit of survivors of human trafficking administered by CalOES with funds awarded from the Survivors of Human Trafficking License Plate Fund.
- 4) Specifies that grants shall be awarded to community-based organizations that are led by survivors of human trafficking or that are guided by substantial survivor input and that provide direct services to vulnerable individuals in areas with a high concentration of human trafficking. CalOES must administer a balanced regional distribution of funds.
- 5) Requires CalOES to, by no later than January 1, 2028, and annually thereafter, report to the Legislature the amount of revenues received into the Survivors of Human Trafficking License Plate Fund, the amount of each grant, and the identity of each recipient.

**COMMENTS:**

- 1) *Purpose of the bill.* According to the author's office, "SB 1018 establishes a Human Trafficking Awareness specialized license plate to create a sustainable funding source for survivor-led and survivor-informed community organizations. California continues to face significant challenges combating human trafficking, and survivors often struggle to access consistent support services. This bill leverages the state's successful specialized license plate program to both raise public awareness and distribute grant funding administered by the Office of Emergency Services to directly assist survivors across California."
- 2) *Special interest license plates.* Special interest license plates allow drivers the opportunity to support causes or organizations they care about. When you order

special interest license plates, a portion of your fees are donated to the associated charity or cause. Prior to 2007, any new special interest license plate required specific legislative authorization. This practice was held to be unconstitutional 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. The fees generated from 7,500 plates are necessary to ensure there are enough funds to reimburse DMV for the costs of adding a new plate. 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. 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.

In addition to the regular fees for an original or renewal 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.

- 3) *Challenging economics of special interest license plates.* The 7,500 commitment threshold has proven to be an insurmountable barrier for the vast majority of pending special interest license plates. For example, in 2014 the Legislature passed, and the Governor signed AB 2321 (Gomez, Chapter 358, Statutes of 2014). The bill directed CalOES to establish a special-interest license plate that promotes awareness of domestic violence and sexual assault. CalOES reports that roughly 100 commitments were made to purchase the license plates, far below the 7,500 threshold. Thus, the commitments had to be refunded. Of the 12 legislatively sponsored plates approved since 2000, only two have met the threshold. Of the four that have passed since 2014, only one reached the threshold.

Additionally, this bill requires CalOES to accept donations to the Survivors of Human Trafficking License Plate Fund on its internet website. It is unclear

whether enough funding will be donated to cover CalOES' upfront investment of creating an online donation portal in the first place.

- 4) *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 good 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.
- 5) *Assistance for survivors of human trafficking.* According to Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), human trafficking refers to the commercial exploitation of people through force, fraud, or coercion. The California Department of Justice reports that California – in part due to its position as a populous border state with a significant immigrant population – is one of the nation's top destination states for trafficking human beings. CalOES currently administers the Human Trafficking Victim Assistance Program, which is a grant program intended to help human trafficking victims/survivors recover from the trauma they experienced and assist them with reintegrating into society through comprehensive safety and supportive services using a trauma-informed, culturally sensitive, victim/survivor-centered approach.<sup>1</sup>
- 6) *Double Referral.* This bill has been double referred to the Senate Public Safety Committee.

#### **RELATED/PREVIOUS LEGISLATION:**

**SB 21 (Glazer, 2020)** – This bill 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)** – This bill 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 140 (Stern, 2019)** – This bill would have required 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 Appropriations Committee.*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.caloes.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/Grants/Documents/RFA/2023-24-Human-Trafficking-Victim-Assistance-HV-Program-RFA.pdf>

**SB 509 (Portantino, 2019)** – This bill 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)** – This bill 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.*

**SB 1455 (Stern, 2018)** – This bill would have required 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 vetoed.*

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

**AB 1251 (Allen, 2017)** – This bill would have required SCC to apply to DMV to sponsor an Endless Summer license plate for a coastal conservancy awareness program. *This bill died in Assembly Transportation.*

**AB 2321 (Gomez, Chapter 358, Statutes of 2014)** – This bill 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)** – Restricts 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, April 1, 2026.)

**SUPPORT:**

None received

**OPPOSITION:**

None received

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