
THIRD READING

Bill No: SB 1218
Author: Arreguín (D), et al.
Amended: 5/14/25
Vote: 21

SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE: 12-0, 4/14/26
AYES: Cortese, Strickland, Archuleta, Arreguín, Blakespear, Dahle, Gonzalez,
Grayson, Menjivar, Richardson, Seyarto, Wiener
NO VOTE RECORDED: Valladares

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 7-0, 5/14/26
AYES: Cervantes, Seyarto, Cabaldon, Dahle, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab

SUBJECT: Refusal of registration: illegal dumping violation penalties

SOURCE: City of Oakland

DIGEST: This bill requires the California Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to refuse to renew a vehicle registration if the registered owner has outstanding illegal dumping fines.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Prohibits dumping or causing to be dumped waste matter on any public or private roadway. (Penal Code (PEN) Section 374.3)
- 2) Imposes a fine between \$250 and \$1,000 for a first violation, a fine between \$500 and \$1,500 for a second violation, and a fine between \$750 and \$3,000 for a third or subsequent violation of illegal dumping. All fines are doubled if the waste matter was tires. (PEN Section 374.3 (e))

- 3) Imposes higher fines and additional penalties for waste matter dumped in “commercial quantities”, defined as waste matter generated in the course of business that has a volume of at least one cubic yard. (PEN Section 374.3(h))
- 4) Requires the court to consider the defendant’s ability to pay when issuing fines for illegal dumping. (PEN Section 374.3(j))
- 5) Requires DMV to renew vehicle registrations on an annual basis. (Vehicle Code (VEH) Section 4601.5)
- 6) Requires DMV to refuse to renew the registration of a vehicle if the owner has not paid relevant fees and taxes, including outstanding parking violation fines or toll evasion fines. (VEH Section 4760, VEH Section 4770)

This bill:

- 1) Requires DMV to refuse to renew the registration of a vehicle if the registered owner or lessee of the vehicle has outstanding illegal dumping fines and has been notified as such.
- 2) Allows the registered owner or lessee to pay the outstanding illegal dumping fines as part of their registration application.
- 3) Allows DMV to recover their administrative costs incurred from implementing this requirement, up to 5% of the collected funds.
- 4) Requires DMV to allow vehicle registration by a renter or lessor if they provide DMV with a notice of disposition of the illegal dumping violations.
- 5) Requires the court to issue a notice of disposition of the illegal dumping violation if the renter or lessor provides information to the court showing that a rentee or lessee was operating the vehicle when the violation was issued.
- 6) Requires DMV to allow the vehicle registration if the illegal dumping violation was issued before the registered owner took possession of the vehicle.
- 7) Requires DMV to allow a registered owner or lessee who has outstanding illegal dumping fines to file a certificate of non-operation, even if they are currently on an active payment plan to repay the fines.

Comments

- 1) *Purpose of the bill.* According to the author “Illegal dumping remains a persistent problem throughout California communities, yet local governments

lack effective enforcement tools to ensure that individuals cited for dumping actually pay their fines. Current law allows citations and penalties for illegal dumping, but many offenders simply ignore them. For example, between 2021 and 2024 the City of Oakland issued nearly 3,000 illegal dumping citations totaling approximately \$1.3 million, yet only about \$109,000, roughly 11%, has been collected. Similarly, local governments across the Bay Area continue to struggle with enforcement even as they expand cleanup and prevention programs. In San José, illegal dumping persists despite increased bulky-item pickup services and additional “dumpster days,” illustrating that cleanup programs alone cannot solve the problem without stronger accountability measures. SB 1218 addresses this enforcement gap by linking unpaid illegal dumping citations to vehicle registration renewal through the Department of Motor Vehicles”

- 2) *The problem of illegal dumping.* Illegal dumping is the unauthorized disposal of solid waste matter on public or private property. It is often done to avoid the inconvenience and costs associated with taking trash to proper waste disposal sites. Illegal dumping ranges from individuals leaving unwanted furniture on the sidewalk, to businesses dumping large quantities of waste matter on the outskirts of town, to contractors leaving construction materials near worksites.

Regardless of the source, the effects of dumping are costly, generating social, environmental, and economic impacts. Illegal dumping can contribute to a sense that an area is deteriorating. Dumped materials block properties or roadways and contaminate the local environment. Furthermore, many of these effects are felt disproportionately by low-income communities and communities of color. Effects are also seen across urban, suburban, and rural communities. As a result, local governments and private property owners across the state spend millions of dollars annually to clean up illegal dump sites.

Although the problem of illegal dumping has existed for decades, amounts of illegal dumping have surged in recent years. Nowhere perhaps illustrates this more clearly than the City of Oakland, where illegal dumping increased 20% between 2023 and 2024 alone. In 2025, the city reported spending \$12 million on clean-up efforts, picking up 12,000 tons of illegally dumped material. On the enforcement side, since 2021 the city has issued over 3,000 illegal dumping citations totaling roughly \$1.3 million.

- 3) *Combating illegal dumping.* Many different strategies have been employed across California to curtail illegal dumping. At the state level, state law defines illegal dumping as a crime and outlines an escalating fine structure for illegal

dumping violations (PEN Section 374.3). The law also provides for cases in which the dumping is punishable by jail time, requires the violator to pay for the removal of the dumped material, and lays out actions professional licensing boards may take against violators.

Many strategies also exist to deter and remediate illegal dumping activity. In 2019, Alameda County (in which Oakland resides) released a report detailing the results of a pilot program they ran aimed at addressing illegal dumping. The pilot focused on the implementation of the “Three E’s” strategy: Education, Eradication, and Enforcement. Under these efforts, the county, among other tactics, used cameras to identify violators in common dumping areas, provided free waste disposal sites, put up bollards to physically block dumping activity, engaged in public education campaigns about the harms of illegal dumping, assisted community clean-up efforts, and increased monitoring and enforcement activity around dumping violations.

Ultimately, based on the experience with the pilot, the report recommended a number of strategies for tackling illegal dumping, including more focus on enforcing existing laws, utilizing camera-based enforcement, and reducing barriers to eradication.

- 4) *Issues in implementation.* Despite the promising findings from the Alameda County report and others like it, illegal dumping remains an issue. In Alameda County in particular, illegal dumping continues to worsen. This has led many to question the effectiveness of the strategies used to date. For instance, camera enforcement was once seen as a silver bullet for tackling the issue by deterring would be dumpers due to the certainty of being identified. However, in recent years the effectiveness of cameras has plateaued, as repeat dumpers have started obscuring or removing license plates, or simply moving to dump in areas without cameras.

Issues have also been raised about fines and fees, which remain the bedrock of illegal dumping enforcement. Equity concerns regarding the ability of low-income individuals to pay increasingly steep fines have led cities such as Oakland to adopt pay deferral programs, allowing for people to challenge fines, enroll in payment plans, or pay off fines with community service. On top of rampant fine evasion by many offenders, this has created a situation where the city was only able to collect roughly 11% of all fines issued in 2025.

As a result, local governments have been looking at other strategies for combating illegal dumping, however many of these come with their own

downsides. Increased patrols by law enforcement are costly and have the potential to provoke escalatory situations in the community. Towing and vehicle seizures risk jeopardizing the livelihoods of low-income individuals for whom a vehicle is their lifeline. Increased criminal penalties are difficult to implement and often highly controversial.

- 5) *SB 1218 seeks to strike a balance.* This bill provides a new enforcement mechanism modeled after existing mechanisms for enforcing parking violations. This bill would require DMV to refuse to renew a vehicle registration if the registered owner has outstanding illegal dumping fines. Similar provisions already exist in state law for unpaid parking violations (VEH Section 4760) and toll fees (VEH Section 4770). In fact, this bill's language is nearly an exact mirror of the statute regarding unpaid parking violations.
- 6) *Deterrence or fee recovery?* A key question about this bill is whether the primary impact will be to deter illegal dumping, or increase the illegal dumping fee recovery rate for cities like Oakland. As noted above, only a small percentage of illegal dumping fees are typically recovered. This bill would theoretically increase that rate by further incentivizing fee payment through the link to vehicle registration. Additionally, this bill would authorize DMV to collect these fees, potentially reducing issues with actual fee collection. However, these solutions may not necessarily deter further illegal dumping activity.

For instance, the mechanism proposed in this bill may not target the worst offenders. Those who engage in the most illegal dumping are already routinely avoiding fee payment, racking up fees of several thousands of dollars, and are currently engaging in long-term campaigns of fee avoidance. Thus, in these cases, the prospect of either increased vehicle registration cost or illegally operating an unregistered vehicle may not be an effective deterrent. Therefore, it is unclear the exact effect on illegal dumping that this bill will have.

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

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

- The DMV would incur unknown one-time costs, likely in the low hundreds of thousands of dollars, to make necessary IT programming changes to create a new vehicle registration hold for unpaid illegal dumping violation penalties and fees. DMV is currently unable to provide a precise cost estimate because implementation efforts would overlap with the rollout of current IT

modernization efforts. DMV indicates that it is unable to complete this workload in advance of the January 1, 2027 implementation date. (Motor Vehicle Account)

- The DMV may also incur ongoing likely minor to moderate administrative costs. While the department would charge an administrative service fee to reporting jurisdictions to recover the costs of placing vehicle registration holds, it may also have additional unfunded staffing costs to address customer complaints, depending on the volume of violations reported. (Motor Vehicle Account)
- Unknown ongoing revenue gains, likely to at least partially offset DMV's ongoing administrative costs, related to the authority to retain up to five percent of collected illegal dumping penalties and fees. (Motor Vehicle Account)

SUPPORT: (Verified 5/14/2026)

City of Oakland (Source)
Antioch Police Department
Black Women Organized for Political Action
Board of Supervisors for the City and County of San Francisco
Californians Against Waste
City of Thousand Oaks
City of Union City
County of Alameda
East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation
League of California Cities
Oakland Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce
Port of Oakland
Stopwaste
Waste Management (WM)

OPPOSITION: (Verified 5/14/2026)

ACLU California Action
Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: Writing in support of this bill, the City of Oakland notes “[Illegal dumping] is a persistent public health, environmental, and quality-of-life crisis in Oakland and across California. Abandoned debris attracts additional dumping, creates fire hazards, blocks sidewalks, harms local businesses,

and disproportionately impacts low-income communities and communities of color. SB 1218 provides a straightforward and proven solution.”

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION: Writing in opposition of this bill, the ACLU notes “The ACLU understands the bills intent to address illegal dumping due to public health concerns. However, as drafted, the bill proposes a costly approach that would not effectively resolve the underlying problem. A better fiscally prudent solution to the illegal dumping issue the bill is aiming to address is for the state to be more strategic in targeted investments in waste disposal in the most affected communities.”

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