

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

S.B. 1987
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Transportation
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As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

When police pull over a car for a traffic violation, typically they are behind the car. They have lights and sirens. For people who are deaf and hard of hearing, they may be able to see the flashing lights, but not hear the sirens. Furthermore, if the police officer using the PA system (public address system) to give orders to the driver before approaching the vehicle window, those who are deaf and hard of hearing may not hear these orders. This may lead the officer to believe that the driver is being obstinate or adversarial when there is simply just a communication barrier.

Currently, drivers who are deaf and hard of hearing can receive a Driver Identification Visor Card from the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services. This card is placed on the visor and identifies that a person is deaf and hard of hearing for assistance in traffic stops. However, this is only effective when the officer is at the window of the vehicle. Deaf and hearing impaired drivers can also have a restriction code placed on their driver's license. Restriction codes can be placed on any type of license. According to the Texas Department of Public Safety, these restriction codes do not interfere with a person's driving, but is to help aid the driver. The particular restriction code for those drivers who are deaf and hearing impaired is "s" which is defined as "outside mirror or hearing aid." A similar problem with these two current options is the fact that a police officer must communicate with the driver initially before being made aware of the fact that the driver is deaf and hearing impaired.

S.B. 1987 seeks to amend the Transportation Code relating to specialty license plates for restricted distribution to include a section for a special license plate for the deaf or hearing impaired. This license plate will be offered for no charge to the driver who is deaf or hearing impaired. The intent of S.B. 1987 is to ensure that when a driver who is deaf and hard of hearing is pulled over for a traffic violation, both the police officer and the driver can properly communicate.

As proposed, S.B. 1987 amends current law relating to specialty license plates for people with a hearing impairment.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Adds Section 504.664, Transportation Code, as follows:

Sec. 504.664. SPECIALTY LICENSE PLATES FOR HEARING IMPAIRED. (a) Defines "hearing impaired."

(b) Requires the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (TxDMV) to issue specialty license plates in recognition of those with hearing impairments. Requires TxDMV to design the license plates to have special insignia to designate that the driver is hearing impaired.

(c) Provides that this license plate will be distributed at no cost to the individual with a hearing impairment.

SECTION 2. Effective date: September 1, 2015.