
SENATE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Senator Jesse Arreguín, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: AB 1085 **Hearing Date:** July 1, 2025
Author: Stefani
Version: June 11, 2025
Urgency: No **Fiscal:** Yes
Consultant: SU

Subject: *License plates: obstruction or alteration*

HISTORY

Source: Streets For All

Prior Legislation: AB 2111 (Wallis) Ch. 59, Stats. of 2024
SB 712 (Anderson), failed passage on the Senate Floor, 2017
AB 2489 (Hall), Ch. 702, Stats. of 2012
AB 801 (Walters), Ch. 273, Stats. of 2008

Support: 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 Mobility and Parking Association;
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; Los Angeles School Police Management Association; Los
Angeles School Police Officers Association; Los Angeles Walks; Metropolitan
Transportation Commission; Move LA; Murrieta Police Officers' Association;
Napa County Bicycle Coalition; 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; Stop4Aidan; Street
Racing Kills; Streets are for Everyone; Streets for All; Strong Towns Artesia;
Strong Towns Santa Barbara; Walk San Francisco

Opposition: None known

Assembly Floor Vote: 69 - 0

PURPOSE

The purpose of this bill is to make it a crime to manufacture within the state a product or device that obscures, or is intended to obscure, the reading or recognition of a license plate by visual or electronic means.

Existing law states that, except as otherwise provided, the general punishment for infractions of the Vehicle Code are as follows:

- A fine not exceeding \$100 for a first infraction.
- For a second infraction occurring within one year of a prior infraction that resulted in a conviction, a fine not exceeding \$200.
- For a third or subsequent infraction occurring within one year of two or more prior infractions that resulted in convictions, a fine not exceeding \$250. (Veh. Code, § 42001, subd. (a).)

Existing law states that, except as otherwise provided in the Code, the general punishment for a misdemeanor conviction of the Vehicle Code is a fine not exceeding \$1,000, or by imprisonment in the county jail for up to six months, or by both. (Veh. Code, § 42002.)

Existing law states that, except as otherwise provided in the Code, the general punishment for a felony conviction of the Vehicle Code is a fine not less than \$1,000 but not exceeding \$10,000, or by imprisonment in the county jail pursuant to realignment, or by both. (Veh. Code, § 42000.)

Existing law 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. Code, § 5201, subd. (a).)

Existing law 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. Code, § 5201, subd. (c).)

Existing law prohibits the installation of a casing, shield, frame, border, product, or other device 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, or a remote emission sensing device. (Veh. Code, § 5201, subd. (d).)

Existing law 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. A conviction is punishable by a fine of \$250 per item sold. (Veh. Code, § 5201.1, subs. (a) & (d).)

Existing law prohibits a person from operating a vehicle with product or device that obscures, or is intended to obscure, the reading or recognition of a license plate. A conviction is punishable by a fine of \$250 per item sold. (Veh. Code, § 5201.1, subs. (b) & (d).)

Existing law prohibits a person from operating a vehicle with product or device that obscures, or is intended to obscure, the reading or recognition of a license plate. A conviction is punishable by a fine of \$250 per item sold. (Veh. Code, § 5201.1, subs. (b) & (d).)

Existing law prohibits a person from erasing the reflective coating of, paint over the reflective coating of, or alter a license plate to avoid visual or electronic capture of the license plate. A conviction is punishable by a fine of \$250 per item sold. (Veh. Code, § 5201.1, subds. (c) & (d).)

This bill specifies that it unlawful to obstruct or alter a license plate with a shade or tint.

This bill makes it unlawful to manufacture within the state a product or device that obscures, or is intended to obscure, the reading or recognition of a license plate by visual or electronic means.

This bill imposes a \$1000 fine for each item manufactured.

This bill increases the fine for selling a product or device that obscures, or is intended to obscure, the reading or recognition of a license plate from \$250 to \$1000 per item sold.

COMMENTS

1. Need for This Bill

The author states:

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. Background

The Legislature has enacted a series of laws dealing with the increasing problem of obscuring or covering license plates. 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. AB 2489 (Hall), Chapter 702, Statutes of 2012 made it an infraction to alter or cover a license plate to avoid law enforcement reading the license plate with a camera. And AB 2111 (Wallis), Chapter 59, Statutes of 2024 made it an infraction to alter or cover a license plate for any reason, not just to avoid law enforcement. The need for these laws is two-fold. First, as transit authorities have increasingly converted their toll-collection facilities to cashless facilities that rely on the use of FastTrack or automatic license plate readers to collect tolls, this deprives toll agencies of revenue. Second, as law enforcement increasingly uses cameras, such as Flock¹

¹ According to a July 5, 2024 press release by the California Highway Patrol, "Flock" cameras provide law enforcement with real time information and alerts to identify and locate vehicles associated with criminal activity. Governor Gavin Newsom announced the purchase of such cameras as part of public safety investments to combat criminal activity and freeway violence. (<https://www.chp.ca.gov/PressReleases/Pages/CHP-ANNOUNCES-FIRST-ARREST-USING-STATE-OF-THE-ART-SMART-FLOCK-CAMERAS-IN-BAY-AREA.aspx>)

cameras, as an investigative tool for criminal activity, license plate obstruction interferes with solving crime.

The California Highway Patrol (CHP) has provided this committee the following citation data on license plate obstruction and sales, which shows an increased trend in these violations:

	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 specifically includes shades and tints for license plates in the list of illegal devices used to obscure license plates. This bill increases the penalty for the sale of these devices from \$250 to \$1,000. This bill also makes it illegal to manufacture devices used to obscure license plates in California.² This bill punishes that conduct commensurate with the proposed increase fine for sales, at \$1,000. For both of these crimes, these fines would apply per item sold or manufactured.

Even as recently amended, the proposed fines are disproportionate to the fines for other infraction violations of the Vehicle Code. Additionally, given that this crime is an infraction, a person has no right to counsel or a jury trial. It bears mention that not all sellers and manufactures are similarly situated. For example, while some big retailers, such as Target or Amazon, sell such license plate covers, on the other end of the spectrum are products found on Etsy, which can be manufactured or sold by individuals. Should this bill be amended to give courts discretion to reduce the fine in appropriate circumstances?

3. Addition of Penalty Assessments to Base Fines

There are penalty assessments and fees assessed on the base fine for a crime, including for infractions. Assuming a defendant was fined \$1,000 as the maximum fine for a criminal offense, the following penalty assessments would be imposed under the Penal Code and the California Government Code³:

Penal Code 1464 assessment:	\$10 for every \$10	\$1,000
Penal Code 1465.7 surcharge:	20% surcharge	\$200
Penal Code 1465.8 assessment:	\$40 fee per offense	\$40
Government Code 70372 assessment:	\$5 for every \$10	\$500
Government Code 76000 assessment:	\$7 for every \$10	\$700
Government Code 76000.5 assessment:	\$2 for every \$10	\$200
Government Code 76104.6 assessment:	\$1 for every \$10	\$100
Government Code 76104.7 assessment:	\$4 for every \$10	\$400

Based on these calculations, the total payment owed if the court imposed the maximum fine of \$1,000 would be \$4,140 per item sold or manufactured.

² CHP has informed this committee that they do not have any data to show that manufacturers have been encountered.

³ Government Code 70373 also contains an assessment of \$30 per each felony, but that is inapplicable here as the offense is an infraction.

4. Argument in Support

According to Streets For All, the sponsor of this bill:

AB 1085 is a necessary step to curb the widespread use of license plate obstruction devices, which are already illegal in California but remain readily available for purchase. Strengthening enforcement against the sale of these devices will close a dangerous loophole that facilitates lawbreaking, contributes to hit-and-runs, undermines public safety, and results in significant financial losses for the state....

License plate covers, shades, and flippers serve no purpose other than to obscure vehicle identification, allowing drivers to evade automated enforcement systems such as toll collection, parking enforcement, and red-light and speed cameras. More alarmingly, these devices enable and encourage hit-and-run crashes—an epidemic in California....

License plate obstruction devices make it easier for reckless and impaired drivers to flee the scene of crashes, leaving injured pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists behind without assistance. These hit-and-run drivers avoid detection because law enforcement and traffic cameras cannot identify them, undermining the justice system and enabling repeat offenders....

The financial impact of illegal license plate covers is severe. Drivers using these devices evade toll payments, depriving California's toll agencies of much-needed revenue for transportation infrastructure.

The Transportation Corridor Agencies (TCA) in Orange County alone loses approximately \$120,000 per month—or over \$1.4 million per year—in toll revenue due to vehicles with obscured or missing plates.

Statewide, toll agencies collectively lose tens of millions of dollars annually, reducing funding for road maintenance, public transit, and safety improvements. By allowing drivers to avoid tolls without consequences, illegal license plate covers unfairly shift the financial burden onto law-abiding Californians while depriving local and state governments of critical funding for transportation improvements....

While California already prohibits the use of license plate obstruction devices, enforcement has primarily targeted individual users rather than the manufacturers and retailers profiting from illegal sales. AB 1085 will close this enforcement gap....

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