
SENATE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Senator Jesse Arreguín, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: SB 1018 **Hearing Date:** April 21, 2026
Author: Grove
Version: April 9, 2026
Urgency: No **Fiscal:** Yes
Consultant: ML

Subject: *Human trafficking: specialized license plates*

HISTORY

Source: California Survivor Coalition

Prior Legislation: SB 374 (Ashby), Ch. 602, Stats. of 2023
AB 2321 (Gomez), Ch. 358, Stats. of 2023
AB 1338 (Gomez), Ch. 268, Stats. of 2015
AB 49 (Buchanan), Ch. 351, Stats. of 2014
AB 84 (Leslie), Ch. 351, Stats. of 2006

Support: 3strands Global Foundation; Breaking the Chains; California Massage Therapy Council; Central Valley Justice Coalition; Chino Police Department; City of McFarland; Community Action Partnership of Kern; County of Tulare; Crime Victims United; Empowerment (dessa Perkins Foundation); Farmersville Police Department; Fresno County Board of Supervisors; Fresno County District Attorneys Office; Fresno Police and Fire Chaplaincy; Fresno Police Department; Kern Coalition Against Human Trafficking; Kern County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce; Kern County Sheriff's Office; Monterey County District Attorney's Office - ODA - Salinas, CA; San Diego County District Attorney's Office; San Luis Obispo County District Attorney; The California Baptist Capitol Ministry; The Open Door Network; Treasures; Tulare County Child Abuse Prevention Council; Tulare County District Attorney's Office; Tulare County Probation Department; Woodlake Police Department; 4 Individuals

Opposition: None known

PURPOSE

The purpose of this bill is to establish the survivors of human trafficking grant program administered by the Office of Emergency Services (OES) and to require OES to apply to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to sponsor a human trafficking awareness license plate program to fund the grant program.

Existing law allows a state agency to apply to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to sponsor a specialized license program. Requires the DMV to issue specialized license plates for the program if the agency complies with the requirements below. (Veh. Code, § 5156, subd. (a).)

Existing law requires that specialized license plates issued under this article have a design or contain a message that publicizes or promotes a state agency, or the official policy, mission, or work of a state agency. (Veh. Code, § 5154.)

Existing law allows the DMV to establish a specialized license plate program for an agency only once the DMV has received at least 7,500 applications for that agency's specialized license plates. Requires the agency to collect and hold applications for the plates. Requires that once the agency has received at least 7,500 applications, it must submit the applications, along with the necessary fees, to the DMV. (Veh. Code, § 5156, subd. (b).)

Existing law requires that if the number of outstanding and valid specialized license plates in a particular program is less than 7,500, the DMV must notify the sponsoring agency of that fact and must inform the agency that if that number is less than 7,500 one year from the date of that notification, the department will no longer issue or replace those specialized license plates. (Veh. Code, § 5156, subd. (c)(1).)

Existing law requires that in addition to the regular fees for an original registration or renewal of registration, the following additional fees must be paid for the issuance, renewal, or transfer of the specialized license plates:

- For the original issuance of the plates, fifty dollars (\$50).
- For a renewal of registration with the plates, forty dollars (\$40).
- For transfer of the plates to another vehicle, fifteen dollars (\$15).
- For each substitute replacement plate, thirty-five dollars (\$35). (Veh. Code, § 5157.)

This bill directs OES to apply to the DMV to sponsor a human trafficking awareness license plate program.

This bill creates the Survivors of Human Trafficking License Plate Fund in the State Treasury.

This bill requires the DMV, after deducting administrative costs, to deposit the revenue from the additional fees into the Survivors of Human Trafficking License Plate Fund. Requires that upon appropriation by the Legislature, the moneys in that fund must be allocated to OES for the purpose of funding the survivors of human trafficking grant program described below.

This bill requires OES to administer a grant program for the benefit of survivors of human trafficking. Requires that grants be awarded from the Survivors of Human Trafficking License Plate Fund. Requires OES to accept donations to the fund on its website.

This bill requires the grants to 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. Requires that in awarding grants, OES must establish a balanced regional distribution of funds.

This bill requires that OES 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, by no later than January 1, 2028, and annually thereafter.

COMMENTS

1. The Need for This Bill

The author writes:

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

Historically, the Vehicle Code required DMV to issue, upon legislative authorization, a special-interest license plate bearing a distinctive design or decal of a sponsoring organization to any vehicle owner that pays specified fees, provided that the sponsoring organization met certain conditions. These conditions included that the sponsor of a special-interest license plate had to be a nonprofit organization and had to collect 7,500 applications and fees for a special license plate in order to pay DMV's costs of creating a new plate, which are approximately \$375,000 or 7,500 applications times the \$50 fee.

In 2004, a federal court decision, *Women's Resource Network v. Gourley*, E.D. Cal 2004, F.Supp.2d, 2004 U.S. Dist., invalidated these provisions of the Vehicle Code. In the *Gourley* decision, the court declared California's special-interest license plate statutes unconstitutional because they violated the First Amendment right to freedom of speech. The court specifically objected to the Legislature "picking and choosing" special license plates that private organizations propose, in essence promoting the message of some organizations while denying this right to others. The court did allow the 10 special-interest license plates existing at the time of its decision to remain in use and available to new applicants, as they are today.

In 2006, in response to the court decision, AB 84 (Leslie), Chapter 351, Statutes of 2006, established the current specialized license plate program to provide a forum for government speech that promotes California's state policies. AB 84 excluded private organizations from seeking specialized license plates as a forum for private speech and thus addresses the court's objection. Newly created plates and the revenue they generate must publicize or promote a state agency or the official policy, mission, or work of a state agency.

3. Existing Law Governing Special-Interest License Plates

Under existing law, a state agency can apply to the DMV to sponsor a specialized license plate program. (Veh. Code, § 5156, subd. (a).) The DMV must issue specialized license plates for the program once the DMV has received at least 7,500 applications for that agency's specialized license plates. The agency must collect and hold applications for the plates. Once the agency has received at least 7,500 applications, it must submit the applications, along with the necessary fees, to the DMV. (Veh. Code, § 5156, subd. (b).)

Existing law requires that if the number of outstanding and valid specialized license plates in a particular program is less than 7,500, the DMV must notify the sponsoring agency of that fact and must inform the agency that if that number is less than 7,500 one year from the date of that notification, the department will no longer issue or replace those specialized license plates. (Veh. Code, § 5156, subd. (c)(1).)

4. The Effect of This Bill

This bill directs OES to apply to the DMV to sponsor a human trafficking awareness license plate program to fund a grant program to support survivors of human trafficking.

This bill establishes the Survivors of Human Trafficking License Plate Fund in the State Treasury. The DMV, after deducting administrative costs, must deposit the revenue from the additional fees into the Survivors of Human Trafficking License Plate Fund. Upon appropriation by the Legislature, the moneys in that fund must be allocated to OES for the purpose of funding the survivors of human trafficking grant program described below. OES must also accept donations to the fund on its website.

The grants must 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. In awarding grants, OES must establish a balanced regional distribution of funds.

This bill requires that OES 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.

5. Argument in Support

Crime Victims United writes:

SB 1018 establishes a specialized license plate program to support survivors of human trafficking and creates a dedicated fund administered by the California Office of Emergency Services. Revenue generated from the plate and voluntary donations will provide grants to community-based organizations that are led by survivors or guided by substantial survivor input. These grants will be distributed geographically to ensure services reach areas with high concentrations of human trafficking and provide direct support to vulnerable individuals. By creating a sustainable funding source and prioritizing survivor-led programs, SB 1018 strengthens access to critical services, promotes healing, and raises statewide awareness of human trafficking.