

February 28, 2023

From: Lt. Jeff Solemsaas

To: Senate Transportation Committee

Re: HB 1295

Chairman Clemens and Senators of the House Transportation Committee,

My name is Jeff Solemsaas, I'm here to voice our opposition to HB 1295 relating to the number of license plates assigned to a motor vehicle. The Bismarck Police Department is strongly against this proposal.

I have been a law enforcement officer for almost 30 years, for the last 10 I have been assigned as the Traffic Commander for the City of Bismarck Police Department. License plate provide a valuable tool to identify vehicles. By removing the front license plate the chances of identifying an owner is greatly reduced.

Our officers frequently rely on the ability to identify vehicle that are involved in a variety of activity, both criminal and traffic related. By allowing the owners of vehicles to only display one license plate will greatly diminish the ability of the officers to identify the owner of a vehicle. I have seen numerous reports in which an officer was able to locate a vehicle that was involved in a hit and run either through the use of video cameras or witness'. Often it is the front license plate that is either captured on a video system or the witness is able to see the front license plate of a vehicle that is fleeing the scene. By reducing the ability to identify vehicles involved in hit and runs the chances of successfully locating a suspect vehicle are greatly diminished.

Obviously, these scenarios also apply to criminal investigations. Because of the rural nature of our state, many criminals use vehicles to arrive to or leave the scene of a crime. Officers are taught early on to gather license plates of vehicles leaving while responding to crimes as there is the likelihood that the suspect will be fleeing that scene. Officers would not have that ability without the front license plate on a vehicle.

The other main area of concern involves the use of license plate readers. The Bismarck Police Department and several others around the state have been using this tool for several years. I can think of numerous examples of criminal cases that were successfully cleared through the use of license plate readers. As a vehicle equipped with this technology travels through an area the system automatically records the license plates of vehicle in that same area. There have been several occasions in which officers have been able to identify a vehicle by going back through that collected data and locating the suspect vehicle.

In conclusion I ask that you reject this bill and maintain the requirement of two license plates on all vehicles. By eliminating the requirement for a front license plate the likelihood of our citizens being a victim of criminal acts would be increased.

I appreciate your consideration and time relating to this bill.