

## Vehicle Licensing Guide

### Reserved/Personalized License Plates-Application For VLIC-4.420

**Original Date:** 09/28/1990

**Revision Date:** 07/01/2024

[Personalized Plate Policy Violations](#)

[Create Personalized Message](#)

[Relinquish Personalized/Reserved Plates](#)

[Governor Series and Low Number License Plates](#)

[Customer Requirements-Original/Reissue](#)

[Front Counter CSR-Original/Reissue](#)

[Customer Requirements-Relinquish Plate](#)

[Front Counter CSR-Relinquish Plate](#)

[DMV Direct Actions](#)

[Points to Remember](#)

[Contact](#)

POLICY	
<b>Title:</b> Personalized License Plates-Application For	
<b>Effective Date:</b> 9/28/1990	<b>Revision Date:</b> July 1, 2016
<b>Authority:</b> Code of Virginia: §§ <<<<<REVISION <a href="#">9.1-900</a> et seq., <b>END REVISION</b> >>>>> <a href="#">46.2-725</a> , <a href="#">46.2-726</a>	
<p><b>Policy:</b> Virginia license plates are available with personalized messages that may contain a combination of alpha and numeric characters selected by eligible customers and approved by DMV. All personalized messages must comply with DMV's Personalized License Plate Policy.</p> <p>DMV reserves the right to refuse issuance, and to recall the issuance of any license plates that violate the policy. Under the policy, a violation is any combination of objectionable characters that in any way, carry a connotation that may be reasonably seen by a person viewing a license plate as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Profane, obscene, or vulgar in nature;</li><li>• Sexually explicit or graphic;</li><li>• Excretory related;</li><li>• Describing intimate body parts or genitals;</li><li>• Describing drugs, drug culture or use;</li><li>• Condoning or encouraging violence;</li><li>• Describing illegal activities or illegal substance.</li></ul> <p>&lt;&lt;&lt;&lt;&lt;REVISION</p> <p>DMV shall not issue or renew personalized plates to any vehicle owner or co-owner who is registered pursuant to the Sex Offender and Crimes Against Minors Registry Act if the requested plate combination can be read, interpreted, or understood to be a reference to children. <b>END REVISION</b>&gt;&gt;&gt;&gt;&gt;</p>	
<b>Exception:</b> N/A	

[Return to the top of page](#)

### PERSONALIZED PLATE POLICY VIOLATIONS

All personalized messages are screened by DMV to ensure compliance with the personalized license plate policy before the license plates are produced.

All personalized messages reserved by any owner or co-owner of a vehicle who is registered pursuant to the Sex Offender and Crimes Against Minors Registry Act (Virginia Code § [9.1-900](#), et seq.), are reviewed by the Special Registration Work Center to ensure the registration numbers or letters or combination of both cannot be read, interpreted, or understood to be a reference to children pursuant to Va. Code § [46.2-726](#).

If a violation is found during the screening process, the personalized license plates are not produced and the Special Registration Work Center (SRWC) takes the following action:

- For customers with temporary tags, SRWC issues the requested license plate type (and the next available plate number in the series) with a letter of explanation.

- For customers renewing their current registration, SRWC extends the current license plate in the system and sends the appropriate decals with a letter of explanation.

When a license plate with a personalized message has already been issued and later brought to DMV's attention that it may be objectionable and in violation of the personalized license plate policy, it is reviewed by the Personalized Plate Review Committee.

Personalized/reserved messages already issued to registered sex offenders that are later recognized to have the potential to be read, interpreted or understood to be a reference to children are reviewed by the Special Registration Work Center.

If it is determined that a plate must be recalled, a "held" is placed on the record and the Special Registration Work Center sends new license plates and decals to the customer with a letter of explanation. Refunds are available for any additional monies the customer paid.

- If the customer does not feel their personalized license plate is in violation of the policy, or the restriction is wrongly placed, they may request review by a DMV hearing officer. The request must be submitted in writing to the Special Registration Work Center:

**Department of Motor Vehicles  
Special Registration Work Center  
P.O. Box 2668  
Richmond, VA 23261-6668**

[Return to the top of page](#)

## CREATE PERSONALIZED MESSAGE

Customers can browse, create, and purchase license plates containing a personalized message [online](#). The [online](#) application also allows a customer to "reserve" a personalized character combination and/or special plate for days prior to making the purchase.

Customers can also create and purchase license plates containing personalized messages at a CSC. The customer may "reserve" a personalized character combination in the system that will be held for 90 days at a CSC, by mail, phone, or on the DMV Website.

**NOTE:** Customers restricted from certain personalized character and/or number combinations will not be allowed to reserve a personalized message in their name if they are determined ineligible by the system, regardless if the personalized message shows it is available in the system.

Most license plates allow for a personalized message; however, certain license plates have different requirements, such as the number of characters the license plate can hold and associated fees. (Refer to [Special License Plate Images](#) for license plate details.)

- The maximum number of characters allowed on standard and scenic license plates is 7½.
- The maximum number of characters allowed on a heritage license plate is 6½.
- Six characters are allowed on all other license plates bearing logos. License plates with logos may sometimes accommodate an additional ½ space when personalized.
- A blank space and a dash are the only two characters that are ½ characters.
- An ampersand is considered a full character.
- Spaces, dashes, and ampersands cannot be used consecutively.

The following letter and number combinations are very similar in appearance and are sometimes mistaken for each other. This can result in license plates that do not display the message requested by the customer. Customers must write numbers and letters clearly on the application.

B and 8	G and 6	I and 1	S and 5	S and 8	Z and 2
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[Return to the top of page](#)

## RELINQUISH PERSONALIZED/RESERVED PLATES

A license plate containing a personalized message may be relinquished by the current owner, and then purchased by another person, providing the transferee is eligible for the plate and the current owner of the plate submits a signed statement relinquishing the plate.

Personalized character combinations or reserved numbers remain available and may be relinquished for up to 12 months after the registration expires. Customer Service Center Representatives (CSRs) must not relinquish personalized messages without a letter of relinquishment from the vehicle owner.

Under **NO** conditions are CSRs to inform applicants that character combinations or reserved numbers MAY soon be available due to a plate exchange or pending expiration.

[Return to the top of page](#)

## GOVERNOR SERIES AND LOW NUMBER LICENSE PLATES

The following DMV-controlled license plate numbers and the governor series license plate numbers **CANNOT** be processed in the Customer Service Center as an original or reissue. They can only be transferred or renewed.

Low Number License Plates
1 - 5000
1 F - 20F
1H - 20H
T1 - T5
Single Alphas, excluding F (Farm) and H (For Hire)
First 20 numbers with single alpha suffix or prefix

Governor series license plates usually carry the governor's first or last initial followed by one to three digit numbers. They are available on any standard or special license plate design. Many past and present governors have introduced governor series license plates:

Series Letter	Governor Series License Plate Numbers	Introduced by:
A	A1 - A999; 1A - 999A	Governor Mills E. Godwin, Jr.
B	B1 - B999; 1B - 999B	Governor John N. Dalton
G	G1 - G999; 1G - 999G	Governor George F. Allen
J	J1 - J999; 1J - 999J	Governor James S. Gilmore
W	W1 - W999; 1W - 999W	Governor Mark R. Warner
K	K1 - K999; 1K - 999K	Governor Timothy M. Kaine
MC	MC1 - MC999; 1MC - 999MC	Governor Robert F. McDonnell
TM	TM1-TM500; ITM-500TM	Governor Terry McAuliffe

**NOTE:** For any reserved number that cannot be accessed on the system, contact the Special Registration Work Center at (804) 367-8468.

[Return to the top of page](#)

## CUSTOMER REQUIREMENTS-ORIGINAL/REISSUE

1. Submit a completed "License Plate Application", [VSA 10](#).
  - Verify submission of signed statement from the current plate owner if an existing personalized/reserved plate is being relinquished.
2. Be the owner, co-owner, or their agent with power of attorney (POA) granting legal authority to act on their behalf,
  - For registration reissues, the customer may be someone other than the owner, co-owner or their agent with POA provided they can provide the:
    - Vehicle's title number and the last 4 of the vehicle identification number (VIN),
    - OR
    - Current registration card.
3. Pay the appropriate fee.

[Return to the top of page](#)

## FRONT COUNTER CSR-ORIGINAL/REISSUE

1. For vehicles not yet titled in Virginia, process a title transaction in accordance with [VLIC-3.000](#) before registering the vehicle and issuing license plates.
2. Verify completion of the [VSA 10](#).
  - Process relinquished plates following guidelines under [Front Counter CSR-Relinquished Plates](#).
  - Personalized plates for Low Speed vehicles are processed in accordance with [VLIC-4.000](#).
3. Verify that the customer is the registered owner and the status of the current registration.
4. Verify the registered owner's address in the system.

- If the address on the application does not match the address in the system process an address change in accordance with [VLIC-3.530](#).
5. Inquire on the requested personalized character combination in the system to determine availability.
  6. If available, process the personalized plate.
    - a. For any of the following “Restricted Plate” error messages returned by the system:

SYSTEM RESTRICTED PLATE ERROR MESSAGES	
Special Plate Restricted Messages	Personalized Plate Restricted Messages
• Restricted Plate Type Purchase-RPLA	• Restricted Plate Message Purchase-RPLA
• Restricted Plate Type Renewal-RPLA	• Restricted Plate Message Renewal-RPLA
• Restricted Plate Type Reservation-RPLA	• Restricted Plate Message Reservation-RPLA
• Restricted Plate Type Transfer-RPLA	• Restricted Plate Message Transfer-RPLA

**DO NOT DISCUSS THE RESTRICTION WITH THE CUSTOMER.**

- ii. Read the following message to the customer that displays on the screen exactly as it appears:
 

*“I apologize; one or more owners of this vehicle are not eligible for this plate; however, I can assist with issuing another plate for this vehicle.”*
- b. When a customer carries plates “in-hand” to a CSC requesting original issue, reissue, transfer or exchange to their vehicle and the following “Restricted Plate” error message is returned by the system:

SYSTEM RESTRICTED PLATE ERROR MESSAGE
In-Hand Plate Restriction
• M9440 Restricted Message Call Special Registration at (804) 367-1341 - RPLA

- i. **DO NOT DISCUSS THE RESTRICTION WITH THE CUSTOMER.**
- ii. Call the SRWC at the number indicated in the error message (804-367-1341).
- iii. Provide SRWC with:
  - Current plate type and number
  - In-hand plate type and number
  - Customer number
  - Vehicle identification number (VIN)
- iv. Request SRWC make a determination of eligibility for the plate.
  - Usually determined while on the phone with SRWC.
- v. If determined eligible by SRWC, complete the transaction per instruction from the SRWC.
- vi. If determined not eligible by SRWC:
  - Read the following message to the customer:
 

*“I apologize; one or more owners of this vehicle are not eligible for this plate; however, I can assist with issuing another plate for this vehicle.”*
- vii. If SRWC is unable to make a determination of eligibility while on the phone follow SRWC instructions for next steps.
- c. If the customer has further questions or concerns regarding any of the restrictions above, be courteous and provide them with the contact information for DMV Direct Call Center:
  - Phone: 804-497-7100, or
  - Email DMV Direct from DMV’s website, [DMVNow.com](#) by:
    - Selecting [Contact US](#) at the top of the home page,
    - Under Email, select [secure online form](#).

**NOTE:** Effective July 1, 2016, in accordance with Va. Code § [46.2-726](#), DMV cannot issue or renew any personalized license plate for any owner or co-owner of a vehicle who is registered pursuant to Va. Code § 9.1-900, et seq., if the requested registration numbers or letters or combination thereof could be read, interpreted, or understood to be a reference to children.

**<<<<REVISION**

7. Collect the appropriate registration fee, reserved license plate fee, and other when applicable:
  - The system will calculate the prorated amount for license plate reissues.
  - LVR fee (refer to [VLIC-4.415](#)), **END REVISION>>>>**
8. Issue Multi-Use (30-Day) synthetic paper license plates (when applicable, refer to [VLIC-4.225](#).)  
OR  
Issue decals for existing plates when applicable.
9. Inform the customer that the new plate, decals, and registration will arrive in the mail in about 4 to 6 weeks.
10. Prepare documents with correct barcode coversheet and place in appropriate area for document preparation.

[Return to the top of page](#)

## **CUSTOMER REQUIREMENTS-RELINQUISH PLATES**

1. Submit a completed "License Plate Application", [VSA 10](#).
  - Submit a signed statement from the current plate owner if an existing personalized/reserved plate is being relinquished.
2. Be the owner, co-owner, or their agent with power of attorney (POA) granting legal authority to act on their behalf,
  - For registration reissues, the customer may be someone other than the owner, co-owner or their agent with POA provided they can provide the:
    - Vehicle's title number and the last 4 of the vehicle identification number (VIN),OR
    - Current registration card.
3. Pay the appropriate fee.

[Return to the top of page](#)

## **FRONT COUNTER CSR-RELINQUISH PLATES**

1. For vehicles not yet titled in Virginia, process a title transaction in accordance with [VLIC-3.000](#) before registering the vehicle and issuing license plates.
2. Verify completion of the [VSA 10](#).
3. Verify the customer has a signed letter (see [SAMPLE](#)) from the previous license plate owner relinquishing the personalized/reserved plate number, indicating.
  - Name of the vehicle owner stating they are giving use of the personalized message to the applicant,
  - Name of the applicant receiving the personalized message.
4. Verify the personalized message/reserved number being relinquished is available in the system.
  - Personalized messages or reserved number plates remain available on the record for up to 12 months after the registration expires.
  - When plates are expired for less than 12 months, relinquish a personalized message or reserved plate number only when a letter of relinquishment from the vehicle owner is submitted.
5. Relinquish the personalized/reserved license plate numbers from previous record.
  - The CSC cannot relinquish DMV-controlled plates. Refer to listing of [DMV-control license plate numbers](#).
6. Reserve the relinquished plates on the new customer's record.
  - Personalized/reserved license plate numbers are **NOT** deleted by Customer Service Center personnel except when a letter of relinquishment from the owner on record is presented.
  - If the customer is restricted by the system (restrict plate-RPLA) from issuance of the requested personalized/reserved message, follow instructions for [restricted customers](#) above.
7. Collect the registration fee and personalized/reserved fee.
8. If the vehicle is registered and has usable license plates, exchange the plates in the system.
9. If existing license plates are not usable, issue synthetic Multi-Use (30-day) license plates (refer to [VLIC-4.225](#)).

10. Inform the customer that they will receive their new plates, decals and registration card in the mail in 4 to 6 weeks.
11. Prepare documents with correct barcode coversheet and place in appropriate area for document preparation.

[Return to the top of page](#)

## DMV DIRECT ACTIONS

1. Reserved plates can be reserved and/or ordered in person, by mail, by phone or on the DMV website.
  - o In person or by mail:
    - Evidence of ownership (registration card or title to assist completing the application)
    - License Plate Application (VSA 10).
  - o On the Internet:
    - Go to DMV's website, [www.dmvnow.com](http://www.dmvnow.com).
    - In the "Online Transactions" section, click on "Plate Purchase" to browse, create, and buy personalized plates.
2. Reserve the plate message for 90 days.
3. Reserved plates can be processed by DMV Direct agents provided the vehicle has currently valid license plates.
4. Advise customers requesting personalized/reserved plates who do not have currently valid license plates they may:
  - Visit a Customer Service Center or DMV Select,
  - Mail in the request for personalized/reserved license plates,
  - Process the personalized/reserved license plate request Online at DMVnow.
5. For customers using the Website [www.dmvnow.com](http://www.dmvnow.com), under **Online Transactions** they can click on **Plate Purchase** and browse, create, and buy personalized plates.
6. Advise customers using online capabilities, the vehicle must already be titled and that they will need a current registration card to complete the online form.
7. For customers **applying by phone** for issuance of special plates or a personalized plate message for which one of the following Restricted Plate Error Messages is returned by the system:

SYSTEM RESTRICTED PLATE ERROR MESSAGES	
Restricted Special Plate	Restricted Personalized Plate Message
• Restricted Plate Type Purchase-RPLA	• Restricted Plate Message Purchase-RPLA
• Restricted Plate Type Renewal-RPLA	• Restricted Plate Message Renewal-RPLA
• Restricted Plate Type Reservation-RPLA	• Restricted Plate Message Reservation-RPLA
• Restricted Plate Type Transfer-RPLA	• Restricted Plate Message Transfer-RPLA

OR

For customers **calling to find out why they were restricted** from issuance or renewal of special plates or a personalized plate message at a CSC,

OR

For customers **calling in after receiving a letter** from DMV in the mail indicating they are restricted by the system from issuance or renewal of special plates or a personalized plate message:

- a. Authenticate that the caller is the owner or a co-owner of the vehicle.
  - o If someone other than the owner or a co-owner is on the phone, advise the caller that the owner or co-owner must call for information about the requested personalized message or special plate.
- b. Check Vehicle Notes in the system for the vehicle the caller is attempting to register. In some cases, the owner or co-owner who is the restricted party will be identified by a note in the following format "**RPLA – Owner#**," where the owner number corresponds to the order in which the owners are listed on the vehicle record (owner 1, owner 2, etc.). If a note exists, and the caller is NOT the restricted party, do not identify to the caller which owner is the restricted party.

- c. Advise the owner or co-owner of the following information:

Effective July 1, 2016, according to Virginia Code §§ [46.2-725](#) or [46.2-726](#), DMV cannot issue or renew any personalized or special license plates for any owner or co-owner of a vehicle who is registered pursuant to the Va. Code § 9.1-900, et seq., if any of the following is true:

- **For the personalized plate messages:**

Requested registration numbers or letters or combination thereof could be read, interpreted, or understood to be a reference to children.

- **For special license plates:**

Design of such special license plates, including any logo, emblem, seal, or symbol therein, references children or children's programs or if any revenue-sharing provision authorized for such special license plates contributes, directly or indirectly, to any fund or program established for the benefit of children.

- d. Offer to assist the customer with issuing another plate for the vehicle.

8. For plates returned undelivered, refer to [Remake/Reorder License Plates](#).

9. **SAMPLE RELINQUISHMENT LETTER:**

To: Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles and/or to whom it may concern:

I, Edward Q. Anes, of PO Box 234, Averett, Virginia 23417, was the owner of a 1984 Ford automobile with the vanity plate "IWIN". I conveyed said automobile to my daughter, Katherine P. Anes, who traded such automobile in the purchase of a 1995 Acura. She now wishes to transfer Virginia tag "IWIN" to her new Acura, I hereby relinquish to her my rights to have this vanity plate of "IWIN".

(Signed) Edward Q. Anes

10. Do NOT promise the acceptability of documents to customers required to come to DMV.

11. Do NOT use phrases like:

- "You have everything you need, just go to a CSC and they will issue your plates."

12. Do use phrasing such as:

- "The documents you have listed sound like they may be acceptable: The CSC will make the final determination of your eligibility to receive your registration and plates."

[Return to the top of page](#)

## POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Reserve messages are available on all weight vehicles. (Passenger plates, pickups, trailers, trucks, autocycles, mopeds, motorcycles, tractors, and semi-trailers, etc.)
- Reserved plates numbered from 1 to 5,000 are exclusively assigned by the DMV Commissioner. Customers must send a written request indicating the plate number they are applying for, their name, address, and telephone number and the reason for the request (i.e. year of birth, etc.). Requests should be directed to the Commissioner's Office.
- For relinquished plates, the applicant pays all original registration fees.
- The customer relinquishing a personalized message may apply for a registration refund (refer to [VLIC-4.705](#)), when eligible, by completing the Vehicle Registration Refund Application ([FMS 210](#)) and mailing it to DMV with the license plates, or they can surrender the plates at a CSC.
- For plates returned "Undeliverable" to Headquarters:
  - The Special Registration Work Center (SRWC) will hold all returned/undeliverable personalized plates for 90 days before recycling. SRWC will add a vehicle note to the customer's record upon receipt of the returned plates.
  - Customers should allow 4 weeks for delivery of plates. If 4 weeks have elapsed, send a DL9 to SRWC (location code: 278) including the customer's phone number. SRWC will contact the customer within 72 hours regarding the status of their plates.

- If the customer's address is incorrect, update the customer record to indicate the proper address and send a DL9 to SRWC (location code: 278) including the customer's phone number. SRWC will contact the customer within 72 hours regarding the status of their plates.

[Return to the top of page](#)

## CONTACT

For additional information contact:

- Your CSC Manager/Assistant Manager
- DMV Direct Help Desk at (804) 367-6646
- VSA/[Special Registration Work Center](#)