

Washington State Patrol

KING COUNTY

LICENSE

INVESTIGATION UNIT

FEBRUARY 2025



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 2134, passed during the 2024 legislative session, mandates the Washington State Patrol to expand the activities of its License Investigation Unit to King County on a pilot basis, extending beyond the unit's existing operations in Southwestern Washington. The Washington State Patrol is required to submit a status report regarding the implementation of this pilot program.

BACKGROUND

Residents of Washington are required to register their vehicles within 30 days, according to RCW 46.16A.140. In 2004, the License Investigation Unit was established to address fraudulent activities, such as registering vehicles in other states to evade sales or use tax. The state patrol, in collaboration with the Department of Revenue, continuously monitors and estimates the additional vehicle registration fees, sales and use taxes, and local vehicle fees collected as a result of the activities conducted by the License Investigation Unit.

HOW DOES IT WORK

The License Investigation Unit monitors out-of-state license plates by driving through neighborhoods and apartment complexes, as well as routinely patrolling highways and local streets. Vehicles found on public roadways will receive an informational warning card, while those parked on private property are verified against the Department of Licensing and local databases for registration compliance.

If registration is required, the License Investigation Unit sends an informational warning postcard to the vehicle owner's address in Washington. This postcard defines what constitutes a Washington resident, summarizes the vehicle registration regulations (RCW), and outlines the penalties for non-compliance.

Businesses with vehicles that require registration in Washington State are directed to the Department of Revenue, which collaborates with the License Investigation Unit to investigate fraudulent out-of-state registrations.

After 60 days, the License Investigation Unit reviews the tagged vehicles to check if they are properly registered in Washington.

KING COUNTY LICENSE INVESTIGATION UNIT

The troopers in King County emphasize their duties, and this is supported by overtime. The Southwest License Investigation Unit assists in investigating plate issues, sends out compliance postcards, and records relevant statistics.

The pilot program in King County began its initial emphasis in August, focusing on Federal Way. During this initial phase, troopers closely observed 241 vehicles in the targeted region. Following their observations, they mailed out 75 postcards to vehicle owners, serving as polite reminders of the importance of adhering to vehicle registration regulations.

Out of the 75 postcards sent, twelve recipients promptly took action and complied with the requests outlined in the correspondence. Additionally, the troopers tagged 53 vehicles that appeared to be in violation, which resulted in ten more instances of compliance.

As a result of these efforts, a total financial recovery of \$5,791.00.

In November, law enforcement emphasized vehicle registration compliance in the Bellevue area. Troopers observed 223 vehicles in the targeted region and mailed 75 postcards to vehicle owners.

Out of the 75 postcards sent, sixteen recipients took prompt action and complied with the requests outlined in the correspondence. Additionally, the troopers tagged 81 vehicles that appeared to be in violation, which resulted in seven more instances of compliance.

As a result of these efforts, the total financial recovery amounted to \$10,607.34.

In December, troopers concentrated their efforts on Des Moines, Seattle, and Bothell. Troopers observed 110 vehicles in the targeted region. Following these observations, they mailed 36 postcards to the owners of these vehicles.

Of the 36 postcards sent, five recipients promptly took action and complied with the requests outlined in the correspondence. Additionally, the troopers tagged 324 vehicles that appeared to be in violation, which led to 38 more instances of compliance.

As a result of these efforts, the total financial recovery amounted to \$14,516.00.

The program recovered \$30,914.34, demonstrating its effectiveness in the initial stages.