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Commissioner

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December 19, 2025

The Honorable L. Louise Lucas
Chair, Senate Finance & Appropriations Committee
General Assembly Building, Room 1404
201 North 9th Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Re: Report on Decal Elimination Legislation (HB 2080)

Dear Chair Lucas:

During the 2025 Regular Session of the General Assembly, Delegate Austin introduced HB 2080, which proposed eliminating the requirement that vehicle license plates display registration decals issued by the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) as proof of registration. After consideration and testimony before the Senate Transportation Committee, the bill was re-referred to the Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriations, where Senator Deeds moved that it be passed by indefinitely.

On March 7, 2025, the Clerk of the Senate issued a letter to DMV, advising that the Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriations had referred the subject matter of HB 2080 to DMV for study. In response, DMV convened an internal work group led by DMV Commissioner Gerald F. Lackey, Ph.D., and consisting of agency subject matter experts. The work group examined the potential impact of decal elimination on registration renewals in the Commonwealth and also reviewed data from the four states that have already discontinued decals for purposes of informing DMV's proposed implementation plan for decal elimination as contemplated by HB 2080. This letter summarizes the work group's findings in response to the Senate's request.

History of Registration Decals in Virginia

In 1972, the Virginia General Assembly reformed the vehicle registration process by establishing a staggered registration system for passenger vehicles, which took effect in 1973. This change replaced the annual issuance of full license plates with a more efficient system using decals to display the registration month and year on existing plates. The reform reduced production costs and spread renewals evenly throughout the year.

In 1975, the use of decals was expanded to trailers, semi-trailers, and other non-passenger vehicles, standardizing the approach across most vehicle types in the Commonwealth. That

transition marked a technological advancement for its time. Fifty years later Virginia is positioned for another modernization in how it enforces Virginia Code § 46.2-613(A)(1).

Under Va. Code § 46.2-613(A)(1), no person may drive a vehicle on a public highway unless it is registered with DMV, subject to limited exemptions.¹ Va. Code § 46.2-646 requires annual or multi-year registration renewals, with a \$10 late fee applied immediately upon expiration and no grace period. As part of the renewal process, DMV issues updated decals showing the expiration month and year, along with an updated registration card. Va. Code § 46.2-712 requires decals to be displayed on license plates, which remain DMV property and may be canceled, revoked, or repossessed for violations under Title 46.2.² DMV is also authorized under Va. Code § 46.2-712(B) to issue permanent plates without decals or expiration dates for certain vehicle types. Additionally, Va. Code § 46.2-646(E) allows law enforcement officers to stop a vehicle if its registration has been expired for more than four months.

Issues Related to the Use of Registration Decals

Inconvenience for Customers

Currently, vehicle owners can renew registrations entirely online but must wait 7–10 days to receive registration cards and decals by mail. Decals frequently arrive damaged or fail to arrive, requiring customers to visit DMV offices in person, often incurring additional fees and spending 20 minutes or more at a customer service center, plus travel time. Also, each year, more than 60,000 decals are reported lost or stolen, forcing customers to obtain replacements and, in many cases, file police reports. DMV records indicate that 660,911 vehicle registrations were renewed in person during Fiscal Year 2025. Eliminating the decal requirement would mean that more than half-a-million customers would no longer need to visit DMV customer service centers solely to obtain decals when renewing their registration. At 20 minutes of combined wait and serve time, plus 30 minutes of drive time, that is almost 23,000 days given back to Virginians every year by removing the burden of coming into a DMV customer service center.

Ineffectiveness of Decal-Based and Ticket-Driven Registration Enforcement

Law enforcement has moved away from relying on physical decals to enforce vehicle registration. Fewer than 1% of vehicles with registrations expired for over four months are stopped or ticketed, indicating minimal enforcement activity. This demonstrates that decal-based enforcement is largely ineffective given that more than 99% of offenders face no consequences for driving with expired registrations.

DMV's 2024 report on vehicle registration renewal revealed the limited effectiveness of the Driver with Expired Registration (DWER) infraction. The impact of ticketing is diluted by low conviction rates: only 53% of ticketed drivers are found guilty, and an additional 15% plead guilty and prepay, resulting in a combined resolution rate of just 68%—approximately 33,800 drivers. More than half of these pay \$25 or less in fines.³ Critically, even when a driver is

¹ There are exceptions, such as for nonresidents and new residents. See Va. Code Ann. § § 46.2-657 and 46.2-662. There are also several exemptions based on vehicle types or uses. See Va. Code Ann. §§ 46.2-662 to 46.2-684.2.

² Va. Code Ann. § 46.2-713.

³ Va. Department of Motor Vehicles, Vehicle Registration Renewal Study (2024) (on file with author).

convicted of a DWER infraction, courts do not require the vehicle owner to renew their registration. As a result, the infraction fails to serve as a meaningful incentive for registration renewal.

Benefits of Eliminating Decals

Convenience for Customers

With the elimination of registration decals, DMV plans to implement a system allowing customers to print their registration cards at home immediately after payment or download digital proof of registration directly to their smartphones, similar to what five other states have done. This change would provide instant access to official registration credentials, eliminate the need for mailed decals, and significantly reduce unnecessary in-person DMV visits. Overall, eliminating decals represents a major improvement in customer convenience, saving time for residents and reducing administrative workload across the Commonwealth.

Cost Savings from Eliminating Decals

Eliminating registration decals has produced substantial cost savings in several states. According to data reviewed by the study group, New Jersey reported approximately \$400,000 in direct cost savings by eliminating printing. (Note: the state did not share indirect cost savings.) The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) projected total direct and indirect savings exceeding \$34.1 million from January 2017 through April 2025. The Connecticut DMV estimated direct savings between \$800,000 and \$1 million in administrative and printing expenses per year.

The Virginia DMV projects similar fiscal benefits, including approximately \$1.13 million in annual mailing cost reductions and an additional \$2.33 million in yearly savings from decal production and distribution expenses that would be eliminated. Indirect cost savings would likely be around \$10 million from decreased staffing needs as more than half-a-million fewer customers would come to the service centers annually (representing a 10% customer volume reduction).

Understanding Expired Registrations: Why Late Renewals Remain a Problem

Despite ongoing system improvements, late registration renewals remain a persistent issue due to limited enforcement and outdated reminder methods. Notably, DMV spends about \$50,000 annually distributing decals statewide, with each decal costing \$0.06 to print—or \$0.12 per pair. While this may seem modest on a per-unit basis, the sheer scale of Virginia's 7.7 million registered vehicles makes it a significant recurring expense. More importantly, decals represent an outdated compliance tool. By eliminating decals, DMV would not only save money but also free up capacity to pursue strategies that target the root causes of late compliance.

On average, 143,304 registrations are expired 0–30 days; 100,085 between 31–60 days; 83,935 between 61–90 days; and 76,300 between 91–120 days.⁴ Approximately 43,219 vehicle owners renew within the first month after expiration, 16,150 within the second, 7,635 within the third, and 6,202 within the fourth.

These data show that decals are no longer effective reminders for otherwise compliant motorists. Improving on-time renewals will require multiple reminders delivered through modern channels—mail, email, and smartphone notifications via DMV’s forthcoming mobile app—rather than relying on physical decals.

Some individuals, however, deliberately evade compliance. More than half of expired registrations (53%) remain delinquent for over four months. As of July 2025, 521,441 vehicles were eligible for citation due to lapses exceeding four months, and as of June 30, 2025, 52,822 vehicles remained unrenewed one year after expiration. Data indicates that fewer than one percent of these drivers are cited by law enforcement—approximately 1,500 citations per month compared to nearly 500,000 registrations that have been expired for more than four months. Given the extremely low probability of receiving a citation, roadside enforcement provides minimal deterrent effect. This trend underscores that law enforcement agencies are increasingly moving away from reliance on decals as a primary mechanism for enforcing vehicle registration compliance.

Moreover, when roadside citations are issued, officers typically cite the driver rather than the vehicle owner, and courts do not require registration renewal. As a result, the individual can simply pay the \$25 fine and continue driving without resolving the violation.

⁴ Figure 1 below illustrates the key figures, highlighted in green for emphasis.

Figure 1: Late Registration Statistics from February 2024 to July 2025.⁵

Report Month	Months Overdue													1 Day to 12 Month Total	4 Month to 12 Month Total	% >3 Months Overdue
	Less than 1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12			
	(0-30 days)	(31-60 days)	(61-90 days)	(91-120 days)	(121-150 days)	(151-180 days)	(181-210 days)	(211-240 days)	(241-270 days)	(271-300 days)	(301-330 days)	(330-360 days)	(360+ days)			
February 2024	126,278	88,634	75,969	76,041	73,492	74,512	68,419	65,926	62,402	58,252	64,773	49,506	42,332	926,536	559,614	60.4%
March 2024	125,549	92,393	75,563	68,212	69,835	68,726	70,746	65,768	63,649	60,572	56,884	63,385	44,126	925,408	563,691	60.9%
April 2024	155,328	89,700	78,471	67,096	62,221	64,838	64,819	67,508	63,411	61,689	59,056	55,575	56,723	946,435	555,840	58.7%
May 2024	136,591	110,826	76,948	69,903	61,372	58,036	61,255	61,899	64,992	61,479	60,127	57,747	49,381	930,556	536,288	57.6%
June 2024	146,159	97,642	95,220	69,228	64,339	57,378	55,019	58,749	59,628	62,978	59,951	58,797	51,265	936,353	528,104	56.4%
July 2024	149,533	103,041	84,337	86,142	64,135	60,364	54,639	52,848	56,690	58,000	61,408	58,713	52,497	942,347	519,294	55.1%
August 2024	141,061	106,115	88,693	76,254	80,055	60,436	57,278	52,571	51,143	55,166	56,632	60,154	52,006	937,564	525,441	56.0%
September 2024	151,570	101,216	91,011	80,191	70,954	75,393	57,664	54,949	50,994	49,827	53,965	55,562	53,242	946,538	522,550	55.2%
October 2024	140,397	107,685	87,947	82,641	74,619	67,123	72,064	55,599	53,116	49,799	48,837	52,994	49,336	942,157	523,487	55.6%
November 2024	133,404	99,391	92,577	79,773	76,755	73,537	64,175	69,330	53,929	51,594	48,804	47,943	47,245	938,457	533,312	56.8%
December 2024	133,498	98,826	87,093	85,185	75,119	73,084	67,844	62,195	67,594	52,669	50,578	48,045	42,948	944,678	540,076	57.2%
January 2025	129,473	91,573	86,156	79,517	79,778	71,506	70,036	65,652	60,594	66,033	51,474	49,538	43,246	944,576	557,857	59.1%
February 2025	132,379	91,735	78,488	78,040	73,760	75,353	68,515	57,549	63,733	59,109	64,608	50,386	44,100	937,755	557,113	59.4%
March 2025	135,082	97,816	78,977	70,888	72,226	69,231	71,746	65,956	65,425	61,973	57,733	63,227	44,798	955,078	572,315	59.9%
April 2025	154,253	93,245	80,949	68,647	63,425	66,253	64,446	67,888	63,083	62,829	59,905	56,130	55,915	956,968	559,874	58.5%
May 2025	144,691	110,861	79,311	71,663	62,309	58,675	62,061	61,248	65,155	61,002	60,968	58,305	49,730	945,979	539,453	57.0%
June 2025	163,950	104,338	95,122	71,355	65,741	58,046	55,430	59,324	58,891	63,068	59,539	59,539	51,779	966,122	531,357	55.0%
July 2025	183,128	114,054	89,284	85,556	65,872	61,291	54,901	52,931	57,111	56,951	61,406	58,156	52,822	993,463	521,441	52.5%
Mean	143,462	99,950	84,562	75,907	69,778	66,321	63,392	60,994	60,086	58,499	57,592	55,761	49,083	945,387	541,506	57.3%
Median	140,729	99,109	85,247	76,148	70,395	66,688	64,311	61,574	61,498	59,841	59,298	56,939	49,556	943,462	537,871	57.0%
Change in:																
Mean		(43,512)	(15,388)	(8,655)	(6,129)	(3,457)	(2,929)	(2,398)	(908)	(1,587)	(907)	(1,831)	(6,678)			
Median		(41,620)	(13,862)	(9,099)	(5,753)	(3,707)	(2,377)	(2,737)	(76)	(1,657)	(543)	(2,359)	(7,383)			

⁵ Note that the chart moves down and across one cell along progressive columns to track a particular cohort. For example, plates that expired on February 1, 2024, are shown in the first column in the first row, the second column in the second row, the third column in the third row, and so on, as highlighted in lavender on the table.

Lessons Learned from Other States⁶

The experiences of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and Vermont provide a strong model for states seeking to modernize vehicle registration. These jurisdictions did more than eliminate decals: they adopted strategic, customer-focused approaches emphasizing clear communication with not only customers but other stakeholders. Each invested in secure digital systems for electronic verification, engaged law enforcement early, conducted broad public outreach and education, and coordinated closely with business and industry partners.

While implementation varied from administrative action in New Jersey to legislative initiatives in Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and Vermont, the outcomes were consistent: improved customer convenience through print-at-home or smartphone registration, substantial cost savings, minimal operational disruption, and continued compliance with registration requirements. Collectively, these case studies offer Virginia a proven roadmap for modernizing its vehicle registration system and transitioning away from decals, while also identifying strategies to increase collections (see Figure 2, below).

In addition, the study group looked at other states which have not yet eliminated decals, but which have stronger registration renewal systems than Virginia. Combining the lessons learned from states that have already modernized their registration renewal with lessons learned from states with stronger enforcement could significantly contribute to enhancement and modernization of Virginia's vehicle registration system.

Figure 2: Summary of State Findings

State <i>(Date of decal Elimination)</i>	Lesson Learned	Implication for Virginia
Connecticut (2006)	Communicate in advance.	Give at least 6 months public notice of the impending changes.
New Jersey (2004)	Directly communicate via electronic and traditional means.	Announce changes on forms sent for 2026 renewal notices, send direct emails to customers, post on website, post on service center monitors, and train call center staff for Q&A.
	Engage law enforcement to improve electronic verification systems.	Ensure continued partnership on systems integration through highway safety grants to local law enforcement agencies.
Pennsylvania (2013)	Partner with other motor vehicle industry stakeholders.	Work with franchise and independent auto dealers, local Commissioners of Revenue, and Treasurers to communicate the changes.
Vermont (2023)	Too early to have reliable information.	n/a

⁶ See Appendix A below for a detailed analysis of cross-state research and findings compiled from multiple sources.

Existing Data Sharing Infrastructure

Over the past five years, DMV has developed and refined a comprehensive virtual data-sharing system in partnership with law enforcement, Commissioners of the Revenue, and local Treasurers. This platform enables timely, accurate verification of vehicle registration and location data. Over the last three years, DMV has focused specifically on improving the accuracy of garaged-location and address verification to ensure vehicles are properly registered within the correct jurisdictions.

This is an ongoing, collaborative effort with local tax officials to enhance data integrity, strengthen enforcement, and support fair, efficient collection of personal property taxes across the Commonwealth. It also establishes a strong foundation for a fully administrative model of enforcement—while still supporting localities that choose to maintain roadside or towing-based enforcement through shared data access.

Summary of Recommendations

DMV supports the legislative removal of vehicle decals as a key step toward modernizing the Commonwealth's registration system. Eliminating decals would streamline the registration process, reduce customer wait times in DMV service centers, and generate meaningful cost savings for the Commonwealth.

Decals are no longer an effective enforcement tool, and the existing roadside system provides limited value. In response, DMV has worked in partnership with law enforcement, Commissioners of the Revenue, and local Treasurers to develop a comprehensive virtual data-sharing platform that provides timely and accurate verification of registration and vehicle location information. This modernized system significantly reduces, and in many cases eliminates, the need for physical decals in enforcement operations.

DMV is well equipped both technically and administratively to support any transition away from physical decals. To ensure strong registration compliance and revenue collection, the work group recommends pairing legislative decal removal with targeted administrative enhancements that will strengthen compliance and enforcement. If decals are eliminated through legislation, DMV is prepared to implement these improvements to support and reinforce a fully modernized registration enforcement framework.

Planned Administrative Enhancements:

1. Increasing reminder notices (currently only one)

The group recognizes that citizens often need multiple reminders about upcoming deadlines, particularly in today's environment of constant information. DMV recommends increasing the number of registration renewal reminders from one to three and expanding the use of electronic communication methods, rather than relying solely on U.S. Mail.

2. Closing the 12-month loophole through administrative action

Under current policy, DMV retains late registration information for only 12 months. This allows individuals to delay renewal for up to a year without penalty, creating an opportunity for abuse. The group recommends revising administrative policy to close this loophole and strengthen enforcement against chronic noncompliance.

In-Depth Analysis of Administrative Enhancements

Administrative Enhancement – Increasing Reminder Notices:

As DMV considers eliminating registration decals, increasing renewal reminders is critical to a successful transition. Many customers overlook the single reminder currently sent 90 days before expiration. Sending three reminders—at 90, 60, and 30 days—would significantly improve on-time renewals. Using electronic communications (email, text, and mobile notifications) in addition to traditional mail will minimize costs. Other states that successfully eliminated decals found multiple reminders essential and often used savings from elimination of decal production to fund them.

Administrative Enhancement - Closing the 12-Month Registration Loophole:

The second key administrative enhancement is closing the “12-month loophole.” Currently, registrations not renewed within 13 months are canceled, requiring issuance of new plates. Some customers exploit this by allowing registrations to lapse beyond 12 months to avoid paying missed-year fees. After that period, records move to a historical database, making recovery difficult.

DMV should retain expired registration data in an active database for at least two years, and cross-check surrendered plates with registration records to verify fee payment. Customers claiming a vehicle is unused or sold must provide documentation. This change, retaining expired registration data for an additional year, will strengthen compliance and prevent abuse, though it may require additional IT and customer service resources.

Conclusion

In summary, the elimination of vehicle registration decals represents a practical and forward-looking modernization of Virginia’s vehicle registration program. Supporting this policy change will not only reduce administrative burdens and costs associated with decal production and distribution, but will also streamline the overall customer experience for Virginia’s drivers. To ensure the success of this initiative, strong administrative infrastructure and clear communication strategies will be essential.

DMV is well positioned to support this transition. The administrative enhancements outlined in this report, including expanded reminder notifications and the closure of the current 12-month loophole, offer a balanced, fiscally responsible means of strengthening compliance and enforcement without imposing additional statutory burdens. By modernizing workflows and

improving direct communication with customers, these measures reinforce a registration system that is efficient, transparent, and easier for customers to navigate.

Collectively, these reforms would help ensure that the removal of decals is implemented smoothly and effectively, while simultaneously promoting timely adherence to registration requirements across Virginia.

DMV also acknowledges that other modernization strategies could further enhance compliance, such as adjusting statutory late fees, expanding authority to place administrative stops on vehicle records, revoking license plates for significantly overdue registrations, or linking registration requirements to vehicle inspections. However, such measures would require broader legislative consideration and fall outside the scope of this study.

DMV welcomes the opportunity to discuss the study group's findings and recommendations with the committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Gerald F. Lackey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gerald F. Lackey, Ph.D.

cc: The Honorable Terry L. Austin, Delegate/Patron of HB 2080

Appendix A

Supplemental Material – Detailed State-by-State Comparisons

Several northeastern states—New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and Vermont—have eliminated vehicle registration decals, replacing them with digital enforcement technologies, a practice that DMV has already implemented. Figures 3, 4, and 5 are based on data reported by each state to the Federal Highway Administration. The study group compiled and analyzed this information to reflect registration figures from the three years preceding each state’s implementation of the decal elimination policy, through 2023, in order to assess the policy’s impact on vehicle registration compliance.

New Jersey

New Jersey was the first state to eliminate registration decals, implementing the change administratively on October 1, 2004. The policy initially applied to passenger cars, SUVs, and minivans. To support compliance, state budget law required four-year registrations for new vehicles purchased after that date. The New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission (MVC) informed customers through newspapers, public announcements, and driver’s manuals, which noted: “The MVC no longer issues license plate registration decals for passenger vehicle or non-commercial light-truck owners.”⁷

In 2010, the MVC expanded the policy to include motorcycles, commercial vehicles, and trailers, issuing a public notice and advising customers they could remove existing decals if their plates were undamaged.⁸

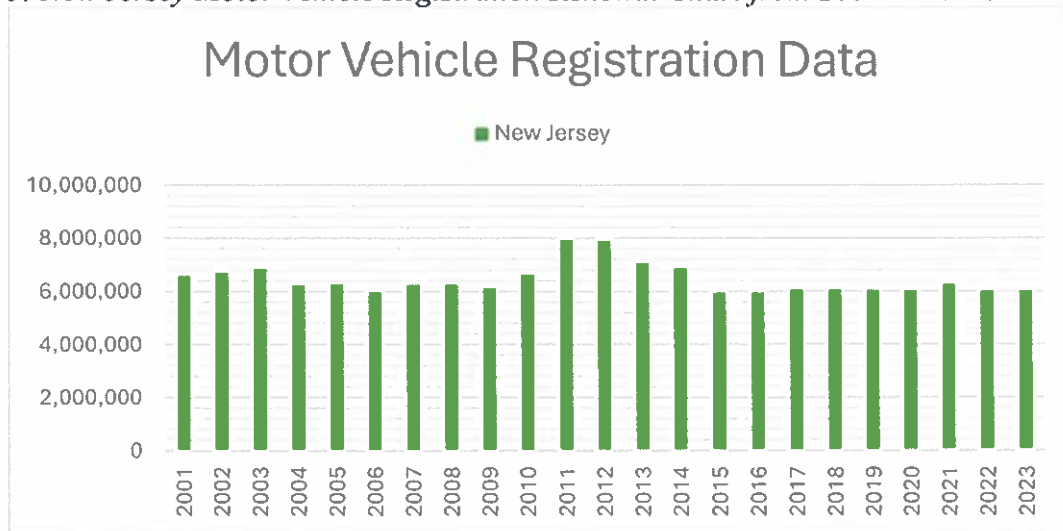
Figure 3 below shows New Jersey’s registration volumes, which fluctuated between 5.9 million and 7.9 million vehicles. Registrations peaked in 2011 (7,939,556) following the expansion of decal elimination to commercial vehicles and motorcycles.⁹ Numbers declined gradually through 2014 and have remained stable since, with the decal elimination policy still in effect.

⁷ [1] Phillip M. Garvey et al., *Evaluation of the Use of Registration Stickers* (Pa. Dep’t of Transp. 2011), https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/dmv/documents/vehicle-services/eval_reg_stickers.pdf.

⁸ N.J. Motor Vehicle Comm’n, *MVC Advisory No. 2010-004: Elimination of Passenger Plate Decals* (July 27, 2010), <https://www.nj.gov/mvc/pdf/about/advisories/advisory-2010-004.pdf>.

⁹ *Id.*

Figure 3: New Jersey Motor Vehicle Registration Renewal Chart from 2001 to 2023.¹⁰



The New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission eliminated license plate decals primarily to reduce costs and address ongoing issues with their use. Customers frequently applied decals incorrectly, and their small size made them difficult to read.¹¹ Law enforcement agencies supported the change, noting that decals had little enforcement value since registration status could be verified instantly through the state's vehicle database—a process already in use by Virginia law enforcement.

Pennsylvania

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) ended the requirement for license plate registration decals through legislation enacted in 2013, with full implementation completed by December 1, 2016.¹² The Pennsylvania Vehicle Code had already exempted several categories—such as agricultural vehicles, mobile homes, trailers, semi-trailers, and overweight vehicles—from decal requirements.

To support the change, PennDOT launched a comprehensive communication campaign. It created a dedicated webpage with detailed information and FAQs, integrated on-screen messages during online renewals, and included printed inserts with all mailed registration cards for 12 months after implementation. Call center recordings and staff training reinforced the new policy, and informational notices were displayed on monitors in Driver License Centers.

PennDOT also coordinated closely with law enforcement, communicating through official channels such as the Pennsylvania Justice Network, Commonwealth Law Enforcement

¹⁰ Federal Highway Admin., U.S. Dep't of Transp., Highway Statistics Series, <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/statistics.cfm>.

¹¹ Garvey et al.

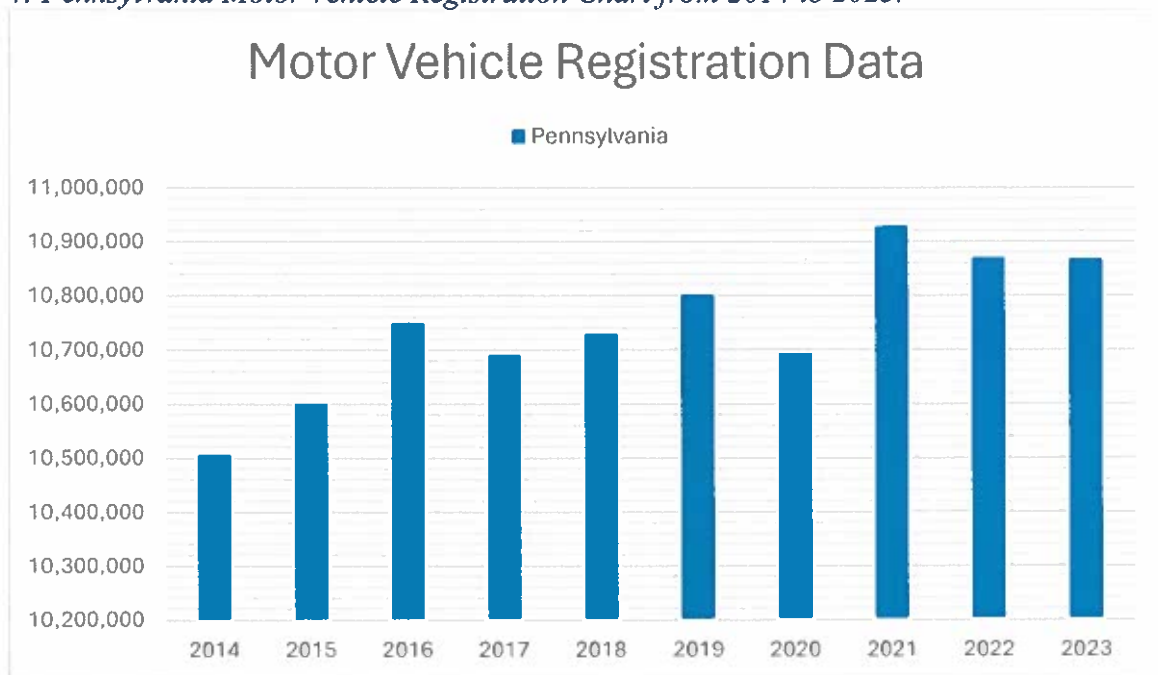
¹² Act of Nov. 25, 2013, No. 89, 2013 Pa. Laws 89, <https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/li/uconsCheck.cfm?yr=2013&sessInd=0&act=89>.

Assistance Network, Chiefs of Police Associations, and the Municipal Police Officers' Education and Training Commission. This ensured consistent understanding of the new procedures across agencies.

Business partners were briefed through formal bulletins, webinars, and training materials. PennDOT engaged the commercial vehicle sector—particularly through the International Registration Plan (IRP), the Pennsylvania Motor Truck Association, and the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA)—to ensure consistent messaging across jurisdictions. Internally, PennDOT issued memoranda and provided training so employees could effectively manage customer inquiries.

The initiative produced significant benefits: PennDOT reported \$34.1 million in savings and an increase in online registration renewal, with more customers renewing their vehicle registrations online than in person. Registration compliance remained stable, with only a 0.55% (59,616) decline in 2017, followed by steady growth through 2019. After a temporary drop in 2020, likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, vehicle registration renewals increased again, peaking in 2021 and maintaining strong compliance through 2023. Figure 4, below, shows the result of Pennsylvania's increased communication and enforcement on registration renewals. This is a great example for Virginia.

Figure 4: Pennsylvania Motor Vehicle Registration Chart from 2014 to 2023.¹³



¹³ Federal Highway Admin.

Vermont

Vermont eliminated its registration decal requirement through legislation enacted in 2023,¹⁴ which also authorized electronic registration verification via portable devices. The Vermont DMV updated its website with FAQs to explain the change. Because implementation is recent, data on the policy's impact is not yet available.

Connecticut

Connecticut began its transition in 2006, replacing license plate stickers with windshield decals, and by August 2010, fully eliminated all physical decals for every vehicle type.¹⁵ The change followed a successful Automated License Plate Reader (ALPR) pilot program.

The Connecticut DMV cited frequent theft and mutilation of license plates—often involving stolen decals—which increased replacement plate requests and staffing needs. At the time, replacement plates cost \$5 with a police report and \$25 without one. Removing decals reduced these administrative burdens and streamlined registration operations.

To support the transition, renewal notices were sent 30–40 days before expiration, allowing renewals up to 45 days in advance. Notices included inserts explaining the new process. Customers were required to register online and print their registration cards at home, with advance notice to ensure access to a printer. The DMV also worked with 13 state police agencies to equip patrol cars with ALPR systems for real-time registration verification and created a database allowing customers to track registration status.

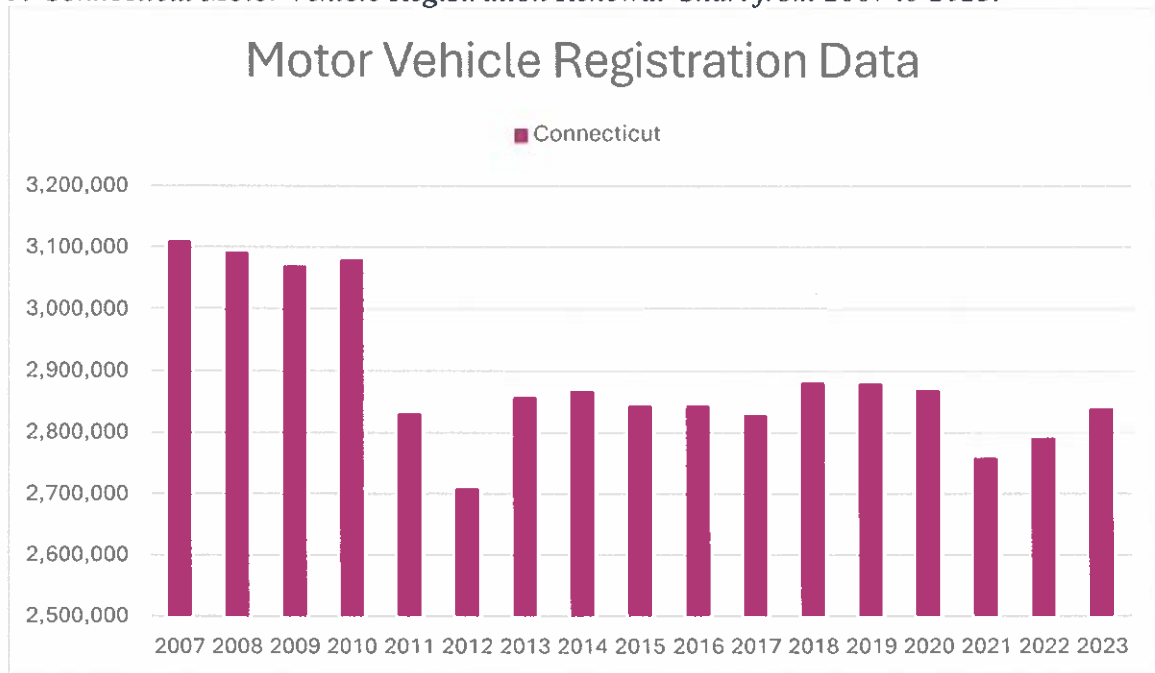
The agency reinforced communication with a one-minute informational video, a podcast, and press releases, as well as advertisements on electronic bulletin boards in DMV offices. FAQs on the DMV website were updated to address common questions about the new policy.

As shown in Figure 5, vehicle registrations in Connecticut declined from 3,082,011 in 2010 to 2,828,794 in 2012 following decal elimination. Registrations increased slightly from 2012 to 2014—a 5.5% rise in 2013—before stabilizing at levels below the pre-2010 range of 3.0 to 3.1 million. Although Connecticut saw a decline in vehicle registrations after eliminating decals, the state has not identified a specific cause for the trend and DMV officials hypothesize it may also have to do with ending out-of-state registrations—where non-residents register their vehicles in another state, a practice still permitted in states like Virginia.

¹⁴ Vt. Act No. 41, Reg. Sess. (2023), <https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2024/Docs/ACTS/ACT041/ACT041%20As%20Enacted.pdf>.

¹⁵ Ken Dixon, *DMV Plans to Halt Registration Stickers*, Conn. Post (Mar. 18, 2010), <https://www.ctpost.com/local/article/dmv-plans-to-halt-registration-stickers-574362.php>.

Figure 5: Connecticut Motor Vehicle Registration Renewal Chart from 2007 to 2023.¹⁶



¹⁶ Federal Highway Admin.