

SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY, No. 203

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: NOVEMBER 27, 2023

The Senate Transportation Committee reports favorably and with committee amendments Assembly Bill No. 203.

As amended and reported, this bill authorizes the Chief Administrator (chief administrator) of the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission (commission) to issue special State Animal license plates. The license plates are to be designed by the chief administrator, in consultation with the Secretary (secretary) of the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (department), and feature an emblem that indicates that the horse is the official State Animal of New Jersey.

In addition to the required motor vehicle registration fees, there is an application fee of \$50 and an annual renewal fee of \$10 for the State Animal license plates. After deducting the costs to implement the plates, the additional fees collected are to be deposited into the “State Animal License Plate Fund.” The proceeds of the fund are to be appropriated annually to the department to support any departmental program to support the health and welfare of horses and to provide equine-assisted therapeutic programs to individuals with special needs in the State.

The chief administrator is required to annually certify the average cost of producing, issuing, renewing, and publicizing the availability of the specialty license plates. If the average cost per plate exceeds \$50 in two consecutive fiscal years, the chief administrator may discontinue the State Animal license plate program. The bill also requires that the secretary appoint a liaison to represent the department in all communications with the commission regarding the State Animal license plates.

The bill provides that State or other public funds may not be used by the commission for the initial cost to implement the State Animal license plate program. The bill requires an individual or entity designated by the secretary to contribute non-public monies, not to exceed \$25,000, to offset the initial costs to design, produce, issue, and publicize the license plates and for any computer programming necessary to implement the program. The bill authorizes the department to receive funds from private sources to be used to offset the initial costs.

The commission is not required to design, produce, issue, or publicize the availability of the State Animal license plates, or make any necessary programming changes, until: (1) an individual or entity designated by the secretary has provided the commission with the money necessary to offset the initial costs incurred by the commission in establishing the State Animal license plate program; and (2) the liaison appointed by the secretary has provided the commission with a minimum of 500 completed applications for the State Animal license plates.

The provisions of the bill will remain inoperative until the appropriate applications and fees required to offset the initial costs incurred by the commission are provided to the commission. The bill expires after 12 months if sufficient applications and fees to offset the initial costs are not received.

As amended and reported by the committee, Assembly Bill No. 203 is identical to Senate Bill No. 2884, which was also amended and reported by the committee on this date.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS:

The committee amended the bill to expand the scope of eligible programs for which the monies deposited into the “State Animal License Plate Fund” are required to be annually appropriated. Specifically, the amendments provide that, in addition to programs supporting the health and welfare of horse, these monies would be appropriated to provide any equine-assisted therapeutic programs to individuals with special needs in the State. As introduced, only therapeutic riding programs would have been eligible for funding under the bill.