Date of Hearing: March 27, 2017

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
Jim Frazier, Chair
AB 1338 (Low) – As Introduced February 17, 2017

SUBJECT: Vehicles: specialized license plates

SUMMARY: Expands the eligibility criteria regarding persons authorized to obtain a "California Firefighter" special license plate to include a surviving spouse, domestic partner, or child of a deceased firefighter or deceased retired firefighter.

EXISTING LAW:

1) Authorizes a person who is a firefighter or retired firefighter to apply to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) for a "California Firefighter" special license plate upon their showing of satisfactory proof that they are employed, or retired in good standing, as an officer, an employee, or a member of a public fire department or fire service.

2) Allows the surviving spouse of the original firefighter applicant to retain the special license plates upon the death of the applicant, and in the absence of a surviving spouse, allows a member of the deceased firefighter's family to retain one of the special license plates as a family heirloom that is invalid for vehicle registration purposes.

3) Requires a fee of $50 for the initial issuance of the special license plates, $35 for the renewal or replacement of the special license plates, and $15 for the transfer of the special license plates, and requires the revenues of the special fees to be deposited in the California Firefighters' Memorial Fund, after DMV's costs have been deducted, and requires fees charged for the issuance of "California Firefighter" special license plates as environmental license plates to be deposited in the California Environmental License Plate Fund.

4) Requires all money raised from the issuance of "California Firefighter" special license plates and transferred to the California Firefighters' Memorial Fund to be allocated to the California Fire Foundation, after the Franchise Tax Board and the State Controller's costs have been deducted.

5) Establishes a voluntary tax checkoff allowing contributions in excess of the tax liability to be made to the California Firefighters' Memorial Fund.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: Created by AB 941 (Nolan), Chapter 1304, Statutes of 1994, the "California Firefighter" special license plate is intended to generate funds for the California Firefighter's Memorial Fund. The Memorial Fund in turn provides assistance to the California Fire Foundation, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. The Foundation uses its resources to fund memorial ceremonies honoring fallen firefighters, educational scholarships for surviving children of fallen firefighters, local community fire safety preparedness projects, firefighter community outreach events, and supplemental fire victim assistance programs. The Memorial Fund also receives revenues from a voluntary tax checkoff when filing state income taxes.

Money in the Memorial Fund is used for maintenance and repair of the California Firefighters' Memorial on the grounds of the State Capitol, among other purposes.

As of March 2017, approximately $14.78 million has been generated from the 42,000 "California Firefighter" special license plates that have been issued since the plate's creation, with 17,335 of the license plates registered in California today. The author argues that availability of the "California Firefighter" special license plate should be extended to a fallen firefighter's surviving family, as with the Gold Star Family specialized license plate, as a means of further honoring the memory of their fallen loved one.

Previous legislation: AB 1561 (Rodriguez), Chapter 127, Statutes of 2014, extended the sunset date of the California Firefighters' Memorial Fund from January 1, 2016, to January 1, 2026.

SB 88 (DeSaulnier), Chapter 304, Statutes of 2010, increased fees for obtaining "California Firefighter" special license plates and established procedures for their retention upon the death of the firefighter who held them.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Professional Firefighters

Opposition

None on file

Analysis Prepared by: Justin Behrens / TRANS. /