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**FLORIDA**  
HIGHWAY SAFETY AND MOTOR VEHICLES

# Vehicle Registration Holds Report

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During the 2014 Legislative Session, House Bill 7005 directed the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (Department) to develop a plan of action addressing motor vehicle registration holds placed pursuant to Sections 316.1001 (payment of toll), 316.1967 (payment of parking violations) and 318.15 (payment of traffic fines and fees), Florida Statutes. As described in Section 320.03(8), Florida Statutes, a registration hold prevents the Department from issuing a license plate or revalidation sticker to a person until they present proof that the underlying toll, fine and/or fee has been paid to the appropriate governmental entity. The governmental entity is responsible for notifying the Department to place the hold in accordance with the appropriate statutory authority. The Department was directed to develop a plan to include a methodology for applicants whose names have been placed on the list of persons who may not be issued a license plate or revalidation sticker to rectify the cause of the hold through the payment of any outstanding toll, parking ticket, fine or other fee at the point of collection of the registration fee.

The ability to satisfy a fine and simultaneously clear the related registration hold is a key component of quality customer service, and the Department is committed to working with our stakeholders to identify and implement system enhancements that will provide these necessary improvements in our customer service delivery. We believe that this can be accomplished most efficiently and effectively through a combination of both short-term and long-term solutions.

## Current Vehicle Registration Hold Process

Governmental entities have the statutory authority to provide the Department with the names of persons who have failed to meet the requirements of Sections 316.1001, 316.1967, or 318.15, Florida Statutes, and have a registration hold placed on their vehicle as a tool to assist them in collecting unpaid tolls, fines and/or fees. A vehicle registration hold prohibits the Department from issuing a license plate or motor vehicle registration to those persons until the toll, fine and/or fee has been paid to the governmental entity. It should be noted that holds do not suspend the vehicle's current registration nor do they affect the individual's driver license. They do, however, prevent a registration renewal.

Florida law specifically states that hold requests can be submitted after the third unpaid parking violation, with no other criteria or thresholds provided for any of the other violation types. For those governmental entities that place registration holds, the process occurs electronically, with the respective authority notifying the Department via an electronic batch

file that is uploaded overnight. The Department places a hold on the applicable motor vehicle record based on information received from the governmental entity.

The registration hold is lifted upon proof of payment to the governmental entity that placed the hold. This is accomplished either through the same electronic batch process directly from the governmental entity or manually when a customer presents a printed receipt to the tax collector office.

Available payment options for tolls, fines and/or fees vary among governmental entities and include in-person, on-line, by-phone and mail. If the unpaid toll, fine and/or fee have been sent to a collection agency, payment options may be further limited.

The type and number of notices given to individuals regarding unpaid tolls, fines and/or fees varies dramatically given the number of governmental entities with this statutory authority. For governmental entities that do not offer on-line, phone or mail payment options, there are some situations in which the individuals wishing to renew their vehicle registration have to first go to the governmental entity that requested the registration hold, pay their toll, fine and/or fee and then return to the tax collector office to provide proof of payment to complete their vehicle transaction.

No additional fee is assessed by the Department to clear a vehicle registration hold. Section 320.03(8), Florida Statutes, states that tax collectors and clerk of courts are entitled to receive ten percent of the civil penalties and fines recovered from individuals for clearing registration holds for toll, parking, and red light camera violations; however, tax collectors do not currently receive any cost reimbursement for administering this subsection.

## Level of Activity

In FY 2013-14, the Department recorded more than 1.7 million registration holds<sup>1</sup>, of which nearly 231,000 were associated with parking, toll and red light camera violations. Forty-five authorities submitted hold requests for these types of violations to the Department. Only one toll authority (Central Florida Expressway) requested a substantial number of holds, accounting for approximately 80 percent of the 231,000 toll, parking and red light camera holds submitted. Parking authorities accounted for nearly 20 percent, while red light camera authorities accounted for less than 1 percent.

<sup>1</sup> Source: DHSMV Motor Vehicle Database for FY 13/14.

Since July 2014, in addition to the holds received from the Central Florida Expressway (approximately 118,000), we have received over 189,000 hold requests from the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority, and since September, we have received over 80,000 hold requests from the Tampa Hillsborough Expressway Authority. The number of toll related hold requests received in the six-month period totals over 389,000. In addition, the Department anticipates a significant number of registration hold requests from Florida's Turnpike Enterprise (FTE) in the coming year.

## Discussion

The Department's current computer systems only allow for the placing and lifting of the registration hold as well as denoting the governmental entity that placed the hold. The amount owed to the respective governmental entity is not transmitted to the Department nor are our systems capable of recording those amounts. The Department's current database relies on fixed amounts of fees set by statute. The age of the current system limits its ability to be configured to accommodate the varying amounts of unpaid violations that must be satisfied prior to removing a registration hold from the customer record. As a result, customers are not currently able to pay amounts due to other governmental entities directly to the Department or our tax collector agents in order to clear a hold and re-register their vehicle simultaneously.

As noted earlier, the Department agrees that the ability to satisfy a fine and simultaneously clear the related registration hold is a key component of quality customer service and is one of the system enhancements envisioned as part of the Department's current project to modernize our computer systems. This modernization effort will facilitate real-time communication between the Department and enforcement authorities. This would also allow our system to rely on dynamic (rather than static) fee data that could be customized to reflect the varying amounts of fines that a customer must pay prior to removing a registration hold. After such modifications are made to the Department's systems, customers would then have the opportunity to satisfy unpaid tolls, fines and/or fees at tax collector offices and simultaneously clear the related registration hold, taking into account the statutory provisions of Section 320.03(8), Florida Statutes, for tax collectors and clerks of court.

Given the timeline of the Department's system modernization efforts, we are actively exploring options that will enhance the customer service experience in the near-term. While these recommendations do not achieve a statewide "one stop shop," we believe they will expand payment options for our customers. Given the number of governmental stakeholders these recommendations would impact, it

should be noted that any solution short of computer system modernization will depend upon the concurrence of both the governmental entity as well as the Department's tax collector partners to facilitate implementation.

- Allow tax collectors to take payments via an on-line application for customers. This is a model already being utilized between some tax collector offices and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for the sale of recreational and commercial hunting and fishing licenses. Expanding this model for multiple local governmental entities may have accounting implications for tax collector offices, particularly related to toll payments where bond covenants may dictate how payment is remitted to the tolling authority.
- Placement and maintenance of a dedicated payment kiosk for the FTE in tax collector offices. The kiosk could generate a receipt on-site that would allow the registration hold to be lifted. This option would improve customer service for 90% of toll violations in the state and may be appropriate in areas of the state where FTE toll violations are concentrated but would not facilitate payment for tolling authorities outside of the FTE nor would it facilitate payment of parking or red light camera fines.
- Expand the use of pay-by-phone options for customers, where authorities receive payment over the phone and immediately fax or email the Department or tax collector with proof of payment so that the registration hold can be cleared.

## Conclusion

As noted previously, registration holds are a mechanism for authorities to collect fines associated with various violations. This method does not stop the individual from driving (i.e., it does not suspend the license) and there is no additional fee assessed by the Department to remove the hold. The inconvenience to the customer lies in the process of paying the fine(s) and clearing the hold. The Department recorded nearly 231,000 holds in FY 2013-14 related to toll, parking, and red light camera violations and more than 389,000 toll related holds in the first six months of FY 2014-15.

The Department recognizes the importance of creating a culture focused on continuous improvement, and the modernization of the Department's computer systems is a critical step in facilitating enhanced service delivery for our customers. The short-term and long-term solutions identified above, coupled with a close working relationship among all of the affected stakeholders, should result in significant customer service delivery enhancements in the coming years.