

TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT[761]

Adopted and Filed

Rulemaking related to personalized and special registration plates

The Transportation Department hereby rescinds Chapter 401, “Special Registration Plates,” and adopts a new Chapter 401, “Personalized and Special Registration Plates,” Iowa Administrative Code.

Legal Authority for Rulemaking

This rulemaking is adopted under the authority provided in Iowa Code sections 307.12(1)“j,” 321.34(1), 321.34(13), 321.34(14) and 321.166(2).

State or Federal Law Implemented

This rulemaking implements, in whole or in part, Iowa Code chapters 17A and 321L and sections 321.20, 321.34, 321.40, 321.105 and 321.166 and 2024 Iowa Acts, House File 2579.

Purpose and Summary

This rulemaking repromulgates Chapter 401 in compliance with Executive Order 10. This chapter implements Iowa Code section 321.34, which authorizes the issuance of certain specialty license plates. The chapter does the following:

- Outlines how individuals seeking certain specialty license plates that have specific eligibility requirements under Iowa Code section 321.34 can obtain the license plates. This ensures that special license plates are only issued to individuals who are eligible for the plates;
- Provides clarity about which specialty license plates can be personalized and which cannot;
- Creates requirements that must be met to issue a nonprofit organizational decal for placement on a decal license plate; and
- Outlines procedures regarding the surrender and reassignment of special license plates and establishes the appeal process if a specialty plate is revoked in order to prevent fraud by ensuring unneeded plates do not remain in circulation and to ensure members of the public have clear guidelines to follow so they are not subject to enforcement action regarding improper use of license plates.

The prior chapter had numerous statutory redundancies, inconsistent verbiage, and several unnecessary restrictions that have been corrected. Rather than having a separate rule for each type of special registration plate with specific requirements separated by plate type as in the prior chapter, the chapter is streamlined by combining like content and eliminating redundant requirements.

Public Comment and Changes to Rulemaking

Notice of Intended Action for this rulemaking was published in the Iowa Administrative Bulletin on November 13, 2024, as **ARC 8334C**. Two public hearings were held on the following date(s):

- December 4, 2024

No one attended the public hearings.

The Department received a public comment from the Story County Treasurer’s Office. The commenter requested that the Department revise subrule 401.2(1) to add the term “random” before “letter-number” to describe how regular registration plates are issued to individual customers and subrule 401.3(1) to indicate seven is the maximum number of characters on a personalized plate. The Department agreed with the commenter’s request to add the term “random” in subrule 401.2(1) because that accurately describes how regular registration plates are issued. However, the Department did not agree with the commenter’s request to amend subrule 401.3(1) because the proposed addition would be duplicative of Iowa Code section 321.34(5). Also, a reference to 2024 Iowa Acts, House File 2579, has been removed since the amendments in the House File have been codified in the 2025 Iowa Code.

Adoption of Rulemaking

This rulemaking was adopted by the Department on January 21, 2025.

Fiscal Impact

This rulemaking has no fiscal impact to the State of Iowa.

Jobs Impact

After analysis and review of this rulemaking, no impact on jobs has been found.

Waivers

Any person who believes that the application of the discretionary provisions of this rulemaking would result in hardship or injustice to that person may petition the Department for a waiver of the discretionary provisions, if any, pursuant to 761—Chapter 11.

Review by Administrative Rules Review Committee

The Administrative Rules Review Committee, a bipartisan legislative committee which oversees rulemaking by executive branch agencies, may, on its own motion or on written request by any individual or group, review this rulemaking at its [regular monthly meeting](#) or at a special meeting. The Committee's meetings are open to the public, and interested persons may be heard as provided in Iowa Code section 17A.8(6).

Effective Date

This rulemaking will become effective on March 26, 2025.

The following rulemaking action is adopted:

ITEM 1. Rescind 761—Chapter 401 and adopt the following **new** chapter in lieu thereof:

CHAPTER 401
PERSONALIZED AND SPECIAL REGISTRATION PLATES

761—401.1(307,321) Definitions.

“*Current firefighter*” means a member of a paid or volunteer fire department who has at least one year of service and is in good standing, as determined by the fire chief.

“*Retired firefighter*” means a former member of a paid or volunteer fire department who has a minimum of ten years’ total service in good standing, as determined by the fire chief.

“*Service director*” means a service director as defined in rule 641—132.1(147A).

“*Special registration plates*” means registration plates issued under Iowa Code section 321.34 or 321.105 other than regular or sample plates.

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code sections 307.12(1)“j,” 321.34 and 321.105.

761—401.2(307,321,321L) Application and requirements for certain special registration plates.

401.2(1) *Plates available without application.* Except for the special registration plates listed in subrules 401.2(2) and 401.2(3) and collegiate plates issued under Iowa Code section 321.34(7) and 321.34(7A), all special registration plates authorized under Iowa Code section 321.34 are available as random letter-number designated plates at the county treasurer’s office of the county of registration without separate application.

401.2(2) *Special registration plates requiring separate application.* The following special registration plates require that a separate application with any applicable supporting documentation be submitted to the department on Form 411260. Applications are to be submitted by mail to Motor Vehicle Division, Iowa Department of Transportation, P.O. Box 9278, Des Moines, Iowa 50306-9278; by email to dot.plates@iowadot.us, or electronically at www.iowadot.gov/mvd/vehicleregistration/

vehicleregistration/plates/plates. Form 411260 may be obtained by contacting the motor vehicle division using the information in this subrule, by phone at 515.237.3110, by fax at 515.237.3056, or at any county treasurer's office.

a. Amateur radio call letter plate applications under Iowa Code section 321.34(3) require the number of the amateur radio license issued by the Federal Communications Commission.

b. Medal of honor plate applications under Iowa Code section 321.34(8) require an official government document verifying the applicant's receipt of the medal of honor.

c. Ex-prisoner of war plate applications under Iowa Code section 321.34(8A) require a copy of an official government document verifying that the applicant was a prisoner of war or a signed statement from a person who has knowledge that the person was a prisoner of war.

d. Firefighter plates issued under Iowa Code section 321.34(10) require a certification signed by the fire chief of the paid or volunteer fire department confirming that the applicant is a current or retired firefighter member of the fire department. Renewal for a current firefighter requires a new certification be submitted to the county treasurer's office. Renewal for a retired firefighter does not require a new certification.

e. Emergency medical services plate applications under Iowa Code section 321.34(10A) require a signature from the applicant's service director certifying that the applicant is a current member of a paid or volunteer emergency medical services agency.

f. Legion of Merit plate applications under Iowa Code section 321.34(15) require a copy of the official government document verifying receipt of the Legion of Merit. An eligible applicant who wishes to receive such plates for more than one vehicle is subject to the regular annual registration fee for each additional vehicle.

g. National guard plate applications under Iowa Code section 321.31(16) require certification from the applicant's unit commander on unit letterhead confirming the applicant's eligibility.

h. Pearl Harbor plate applications under Iowa Code section 321.34(17) require a copy of an official government document verifying that the applicant was stationed at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, as a member of the armed forces on December 7, 1941.

i. Purple heart, silver star, and bronze star plate applications under Iowa Code sections 321.34(18) and 321.34(20) require an official military order, the report of discharge, or DD Form 214 confirming the applicant's receipt of the award.

j. Gold star plate applications under Iowa Code section 321.34(24) require written approval from the Iowa department of veterans affairs confirming the lineage of applicant to the deceased veteran and documentation that the veteran is deceased due to military service.

k. U.S. armed forces retired special plates under Iowa Code section 321.34(19) require documentation that the U.S. armed forces recognizes the person as retired from the U.S. armed forces, in the form of the official military order confirming the applicant's retirement, report of discharge, or DD Form 214.

l. Distinguished service, navy, or air force cross plates under Iowa Code section 321.34(20A) require an official military order, the report of discharge, or DD Form 214 confirming the applicant's receipt of the award.

m. Soldier's, navy and marine corps, or airman's medal plates under Iowa Code section 321.34(20B) require an official military order, the report of discharge, or DD Form 214 confirming the applicant's receipt of the award.

n. U.S. veteran plate applications under Iowa Code section 321.34(27) require a certification from the Iowa department of veterans affairs that the applicant qualifies as an honorably discharged veteran.

o. Disabled veteran plate applications under Iowa Code section 321.166(6) require a certification from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs that the United States government has provided or has assisted in providing the motor vehicle to the disabled veteran. A separate certification may be required for any subsequently acquired vehicle or when the veteran moves to another county.

p. Notwithstanding any provision of this rule to the contrary, an applicant seeking any military or armed forces special registration plate may submit alternate documentation if approved by the Iowa office of the adjutant general or the Iowa department of veterans affairs.

401.2(3) *Persons with disabilities special registration plates.* Plates issued under Iowa Code section 321.34(14) are available from the department or county treasurer and require the application and statement of disability prescribed by 761—subrule 411.3(2), including certification that the applicant meets the eligibility requirements of Iowa Code section 321.34(14). If applicable, the application also requires certification of residency on Form 411120. In lieu of the statement of disability, a veteran may submit a certification of disability from the U.S. Department of Veteran’s Affairs.

401.2(4) *Plates with minimum ordering requirements.* Applicants seeking a combat infantryman badge, combat action badge, combat action ribbon, air force combat action medal, combat medical badge, or civil war sesquicentennial plate under Iowa Code section 321.34(20C) or 321.34(25) are to apply to the department.

a. Applications for combat infantryman badge, combat action badge, combat action ribbon, air force combat action medal, or combat medical badge plates require a copy of an official government document verifying that the applicant received such award.

b. Applications for civil war sesquicentennial plates do not require additional documentation.

401.2(5) *Fees due.* The applicable statutory issuance fee for each special registration plate under Iowa Code section 321.34 is due at the time of application.

401.2(6) *Vehicles eligible.* Unless otherwise specified in Iowa Code section 321.34, special registration plates are available for motor vehicles subject to registration under Iowa Code section 321.109(1), autocycles, motor trucks, motor homes, multipurpose vehicles, motorcycles, trailers, and travel trailers.

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code sections 307.12(1) “j,” 321.34 and 321.105 and chapter 321L.

761—401.3(321) Character limits. In addition to the character requirements of Iowa Code sections 321.34(5), 321.34(12), and 321.166, the following provisions apply to all personalized and special registration plates:

401.3(1) Plates will be issued with a minimum of two characters.

401.3(2) Plates with a processed emblem, and plates issued under Iowa Code section 321.34(13), are limited to five characters whether personalized or issued as a letter-number designated plate.

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code sections 321.34 and 321.166.

761—401.4(17A,321) Nonprofit organization decal approval and issuance.

401.4(1) *Application.* An organization meeting the criteria of Iowa Code section 321.34(13) “a” and 321.34(13) “b” must apply to the department for approval of the decal design and issuance on Form 411346. The department is to notify the organization of approval or denial of the proposed decal within 60 days of application receipt.

401.4(2) *Decal design.* In addition to satisfying the requirements of Iowa Code section 321.34(13) “d,” an approved decal will be limited to dimensions of 2.875” in width and 3” in height and designed to be placed in the space reserved for the decal on the nonprofit organizational decal plate. The department may consult with other organizations, law enforcement authorities, and the public regarding approval or denial of the decal design.

401.4(3) *Revocation.* If, following approval of the decal, the department determines a false application was submitted or that the decal or the issuing organization is in violation of Iowa Code section 321.34(13) or this chapter, the department shall revoke the organization’s approval to issue the decal.

401.4(4) *Notice.* If the department denies or revokes the decal design, the department will send notice of the denial or revocation by certified mail to the organization at the address listed on the application. The revocation or denial takes effect 20 days from the date of mailing. The organization may contest the decision in accordance with 761—Chapter 13. The request will be deemed timely if it is delivered or postmarked on or before the effective date specified in the notice.

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code chapter 17A and section 321.34.

761—401.5(307,321) Personalized plates.

401.5(1) Personalized plates under Iowa Code section 321.34(5) are available to order online through the department's website at www.iowadot.gov/mvd/personalizedplates/home.aspx. An applicant unable to order online may contact the motor vehicle division at the address or phone number listed in subrule 401.2(2) to apply in an alternate manner.

401.5(2) An application for a personalized plate will be rejected if the requested combination of characters is issued to another vehicle or is reserved for any other vehicle plate series under Iowa Code chapter 321.

401.5(3) The department shall not issue any combination of characters it determines is:

- a. Denoting a government agency;
- b. Sexual in connotation;
- c. A term of vulgarity, contempt, prejudice, hostility, insult, or racial or ethnic degradation;
- d. Recognized as a swear word;
- e. A reference to an illegal substance;
- f. A reference to a criminal act;
- g. Offensive; or
- h. A foreign word falling into any of these categories.

401.5(4) Personalized plates are not available for the plates listed in paragraphs 401.2(2) "a" through "c," "f," and "o."

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code sections 307.12(1) "j," 321.34, and 321.166.

761—401.6(307,321) Issuance of special registration plates.

401.6(1) Only a person who is an owner or lessee of a vehicle with current registration is eligible to receive special registration plates. The registration plates previously issued to the vehicle are to be surrendered to the county treasurer prior to issuance of new special registration plates.

401.6(2) Special registration plate fees are not eligible to be prorated.

401.6(3) Special registration plates are void if they are not assigned to a vehicle within 90 days after the date the county receives the plates, or if they are replacement plates issued as part of a periodic replacement cycle, within 90 days after the last day of the month of expiration of registration. If the plates are not picked up within the 90-day period, the plates are to be destroyed and a new application and a new issuance fee are to be submitted.

401.6(4) When an applicant provides proof to the department that a special registration plate has been lost or damaged, the applicant may obtain replacement plates containing the applicant's previous plate number upon payment of the statutory fee.

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code sections 307.12(1) "j," 321.26, 321.34 and 321.42.

761—401.7(307,321) Renewal.

401.7(1) Registration plates under this chapter are to be renewed at the office of the applicable county treasurer. All applicable annual statutory fees for the special registration plate or personalized plate are due at the same time the regular annual registration fee is due and are in addition to the regular annual registration fee.

401.7(2) If renewal of a personalized registration plate is delinquent beyond the period authorized under Iowa Code section 321.40(1), a new application and new statutory issuance fee(s) are required. In addition, the department may issue the combination of characters on personalized plates to another applicant.

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code sections 307.12(1) "j," 321.20, 321.34, 321.40 and 321.105.

761—401.8(307,321) Reassignment or surrender of special registration plates.

401.8(1) *Reassignment.*

a. A vehicle owner or lessee who has special registration plates assigned to a currently registered vehicle may request that the plates or the plate character sequence be reassigned to another currently

registered vehicle owned or leased by that person or owned or leased by another person, provided the assignee is eligible for the special registration plates.

b. To reassign plates to a vehicle owned or leased by another person, a written request for reassignment signed by both the assignor and assignee must be submitted to the county treasurer of the assignee's county of residence. The special registration plates will be issued to the assignee by the county treasurer in exchange for the registration plates previously issued.

401.8(2) *Qualifying events requiring surrender or reassignment.* Special registration plates issued to a person are to be surrendered to the county treasurer in exchange for regular registration plates within 30 days of a qualifying event. Alternatively, a person may request reassignment of the plates within 30 days of a qualifying event. A qualifying event includes the following:

- a.* The person is no longer eligible for the plates.
- b.* The person has sold or transferred the vehicle to another person.
- c.* The person was the lessee of the vehicle and the lease was terminated.
- d.* The person died, except to the extent that Iowa Code section 321.34 permits another person to retain such plates on the vehicle.

401.8(3) *Fees due.* If the vehicle was exempt from the payment of regular registration fees due to the type of special registration plates issued, the vehicle becomes subject to the payment of regular registration fees on the first day of the month following the date of the event that made the person ineligible or the person's death. The regular registration fees will be prorated for the remaining unexpired months of the registration year.

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code sections 307.12(1)“j,” 321.34 and 321.40.

761—401.9(17A,307,321) Revocation of plates—appeal.

401.9(1) A special registration plate or personalized plate shall be revoked if the department determines it has been issued in conflict with the statutes or rules governing the plate's issuance. The department shall send the notice of revocation to a person's mailing address by certified mail, and the revocation takes effect 20 days from the date of mailing. Revoked plates must be surrendered to the county treasurer within ten days of the date of receipt of the notice.

401.9(2) The person may contest the decision of the department in accordance with 761—Chapter 13. The request will be deemed timely if it is delivered or postmarked on or before the effective date specified in the notice.

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code chapter 17A and sections 307.12(1)“j” and 321.34.

761—401.10(307,321) Refund of fees. No refund of fees for special or personalized registration plates shall be allowed unless the plates were issued in error or in conflict with the statutes or rules governing their issuance.

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code sections 307.12(1)“j” and 321.34.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: For replacement pages for IAC, see IAC Supplement 2/19/25.