

## **NEW JERSEY S AMATEUR RADIO LICENSE PLATE BILL**

*by Justin Mattes, KC2GIK(#6748)*

Amateur radio operators play an essential role in providing emergency communications when other means have failed. We are trained to communicate very efficiently with each other to get emergency messages to the right people quickly. For example during September 11<sup>th</sup>, operators from all over country came together to help New York City following the devastating terrorist attacks. Hams have also provided communications at marathons, parades and other community events. It has been a long battle for hams to get the proper recognition for their services. With more of a focus on security, one of the problems is allowing people access to certain areas without compromising the scene. This is why hams in New Jersey have sought to have the legend read either **AMATEUR RADIO** or **HAM RADIO** instead of just a personalized plate with their callsign on it, which anyone including non-ham radio operators can get.

Every state in the country has allowed license plates with callsigns on them, however few have captions. In 1939 Michigan was the first state to issue plates, but stopped until 1954. Tennessee started to use the term **RADIO** in 1951 and then later switched to the term **EMERGENCY**. Arkansas was the first state to issue plates with the caption **AMATEUR RADIO** during 1951. Illinois followed this example five years later by having the word **AMATEUR** going vertically down the right side of the plate and **RADIO** going down the other side. Currently two New England states, Connecticut and Massachusetts have a lightning bolt graphic separating the callsign. New York has a picture of an antenna in front of the callsign that signifies a ham is behind the wheel. Since callsigns in the midwest have the number zero in them (i.e. WUABC) the state decided to have a **U**

instead of the traditional zero like on regular plates to signify the difference between ham radio plates and custom plates with the number 0" . Other states to use the slant bar include Missouri which along with Nebraska started using the slant bar in 1952 and South Dakota a year later. Iowa and Kansas were the last states to start using the U in 1954. Back in 1973 Kentucky issued a plate with the caption AM. RADIO , which might have been confused with the AM broadcast band we listen to in our cars. Some states require mobile ham radio equipment be installed in order for operators to have call sign license plates on their vehicles. In order for hams to get the plates they have to submit a copy of their FCC issued license and various fees. There have been rumors that other states might change their ham radio plate designs.

Back in 1965 New Jersey passed a bill permitting the use of personalized license plates, however it took three years to be implemented . This enabled a combination of up to seven letters and numbers, including spaces on the plate. It didn't take radio operators in the Garden State long to start requesting their call signs on their plates. In order for amateurs in New Jersey to get their call signs on their plates, they had to submit to a background check. Since all call signs are unique to the individual, there is never a conflict when an operator applies for his or her license plates. You can get personalized plates for leased vehicles, but it requires additional paperwork and fees. Once the ham radio plate bill becomes law, amateurs will be able to transfer the plates from one vehicle to another more easily . This has been a long battle, but thanks to many people, this bill will hopefully be signed into law real soon.

Bill Hudzik, W2UDT is the ARRL Section Manager for Northern NJ, who together with help from Jeff Friedman, K3JF and other hams throughout New Jersey wanted the Senate to update ham radio plate, P.L. 1968, with these changes.

It also might attract other people's interest into getting their amateur licenses. Some people might think ham radio is on its way out with the advent of cell phones and the Internet; but truthfully when all other ways of communicating are down, ham radio is there to pick up the ball! If this bill passes, it will serve as a reminder of the services ham radio operators provide to their local communities.

The bill is broken down into two sections:

The Director of Motor Vehicles shall cause to be issued to applicants who hold amateur radio licenses issued by the Federal Communications Commission, registration plates for motor vehicles owned or leased by the applicants bearing the term "amateur radio" and the amateur radio call letters of the respective applicants. The director, upon request, shall cause to be issued duplicate plates, with such marks as the director may deem appropriate to distinguish them from the original plates, for any additional motor vehicle which an applicant may register.

This section of the bill approves the caption of "AMATEUR RADIO" to appear at the bottom of the plate. If the applicant owns more than one vehicle, the bill will allow him or her to get duplicate sets. In New Jersey when someone requests duplicate plates, a "-2" is used to identify a second set of plates. This is standard policy for all duplicate plates issued by the state Department of Motor Vehicles.

Another big part is the cost of the plate itself. In New Jersey a regular vanity plate costs \$50 a year in addition to the regular registration fees. This bill will cut the year fee to a more reasonable \$15 dollars. The director of the DMV will require the applicant to present a copy of a valid FCC-issued ham radio license.

This is where Section 2 of the bill becomes important:

Application for registration of such motor vehicles and for the issuance of such amateur radio call letter registration plates shall be made in such form and accompanied by such proof as the director shall prescribe. An additional fee of \$15 shall be paid for the issuance or replacement of any such plates.

It has taken a long time for this bill to be approved. A lot of hams have worked hard to demonstrate the importance of this bill. The hams radio operators in New Jersey have used other states as an example to help get this bill passed. All the hard work payed off when the approved the bill on December 21<sup>st</sup> when both the Senate and the House of Representatives passed the New Jersey Ham Radio license plate bill. By passing the ham radio license plate bill, state officials have shown the work ham radio operators hasn t gone unnoticed.

I would like to thank fellow ham operator and ALPCA member Mike Ludkeiwcz, W1DGJ (#5340) for sharing his expertise on amateur radio license plate history. Also a special thank you to Bill Hudzik, W2DUT, for the providing the background on the NJ ham radio license plate bill and other useful information.

