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## News

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### Florida won't try to privatize license tag services

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Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles

The state will use an online poll to allow Florida drivers to choose a favorite of these four license plate designs.

By MIKE SALINERO | The Tampa Tribune  
Published: December 09, 2012

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**TAMPA --** The Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles says it won't try to privatize its license tag services.

Tax collectors, who distribute state tags, and two manufacturing groups had lobbied election officials and filed legal action against the department to block the changes.

Highway Safety executive director Julie Jones said Friday the agency wanted to save money by paying private companies \$31.4 million over two years to make tags and distribute mail and online orders. She said she abandoned the idea under pressure by tax collectors, Attorney General Pam Bondi and Chief Financial Officer Jeff Atwater.

Now, prisoners make the plates under the privately run PRIDE prison industries program. Tax collectors distribute them. The plates cost \$28 and are good for 10 years.

The system had worked for decades with little controversy until Jones put the work out for bids.

Hillsborough County Tax Collector Doug Belden said hiring a private company to distribute plates would stick motorists with unnecessary fees and lower the level of service.



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"I was elected to bring the highest level of efficiency and customer service and to protect the taxpayers from unnecessary taxes and fees," he said Friday. "I believe this process she is proposing is a degradation of the process we're very proud of."

The state still plans to redesign license plates. Residents can vote on four proposed designs at [Vote4FloridaTag.com](http://Vote4FloridaTag.com). The goal is to make letters and numbers more legible and to add a seventh character.

The department is running out of combinations with six characters.

Jones planned to ask the governor and Cabinet to approve the redesign proposal and bidding process on Oct. 23. But she pulled the item at the last minute because of resistance from Florida's 67 tax collectors.

When Jones went ahead with requests for bids, which the state calls "invitations to negotiate," tax collectors cried foul. They said they were kept out of the loop on the plans.

They also charged Jones reneged on her promise to separate license plate design from distribution and inventory management, duties handled by tax collectors as highway department agents.

Highway department spokeswoman Kirsten Olsen-Doolan said the department decided to issue invitations to get information on new technologies in license plate design and prices manufacturers would charge. As for separating the redesign from distribution, she said the two functions are not combined, but the invitations ask for responses on each. "It's a good time when you're asking for information to get information on all the topics," she said. "There was no agreement to stop researching anything. A lot of people are acting like there's been a formal proposal and there hasn't been."

Florida PRIDE charges the state \$1.72 per plate, Belden said. Tax collectors charge \$28 per plate, all of which goes to the state. Tax collectors make no money on distribution or inventory control, he said.

Jones said she wants to look at designs for a "flat" plate, instead of the current embossed tags with raised letters and numerals. Some expressway authorities have said digital cameras in toll booths often can't differentiate between some numbers and letters, such as Bs and 8s, and Qs and 0s.

Belden said he doesn't believe embossed plates are any harder to read than the flat ones. He quoted Jones as saying the flat plates would cost \$31 million over two years.

But there is anecdotal evidence raised characters on embossed plates can cause shadows that blur distinctions between some letters and numerals, said Daniel Findley, researcher at the Institute for Transportation Research and Education at North Carolina State University.

The Associated Press contributed to this story. [msaliner@tampatrib.com](mailto:msaliner@tampatrib.com) (813) 259-8303

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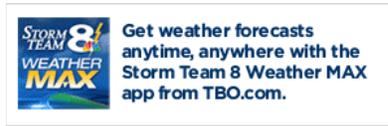
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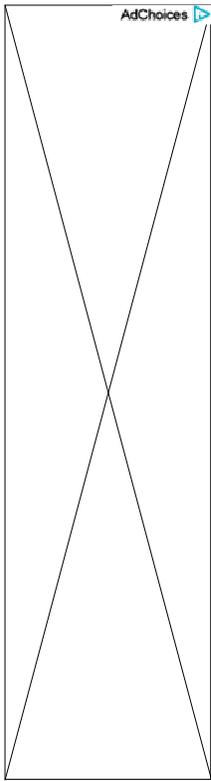


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