



U.S. Department of Justice

Civil Rights Division

*Office of the Assistant Attorney General
Washington, D.C. 20530*

September 3, 2026

Via U.S. Mail and Electronic Mail

The Honorable Kathryn B. Thomson
Secretary of Transportation
Harry R. Hughes Department of Transportation Building
7201 Corporate Center Drive
Hanover, MD 21076
secretary@mdot.maryland.gov

Re: Fee for Nonresident Vehicle Permit in Maryland

Dear Secretary Thomson:

I write today with concerns that the State of Maryland's ("Maryland") failure to provide an exemption for servicemembers and their spouses to its nonresident vehicle permit fee violates the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act ("SCRA"). I urge you to immediately take corrective action, outlined below.

The Department of Justice's Servicemembers and Veterans Initiative ("SVI"), housed in the Civil Rights Division, has received several complaints that the Maryland Department of Transportation Motor Vehicle Administration ("MVA") is requiring non-resident servicemembers and military spouses stationed in Maryland to pay a fee to obtain a nonresident permit for any vehicle that is registered out-of-state. Maryland does not appear to offer an exemption from the permit or fee for servicemembers and their spouses.

This failure violates the SCRA, which Congress passed "to provide for, strengthen, and expedite the national defense" by enabling servicemembers "to devote their entire energy to the defense needs of the Nation."¹ Meeting the national security needs of our nation requires our servicemembers and their families to frequently relocate. Servicemembers and their families often must leave their permanent residence and uproot their lives to fulfill their military obligations. To support these families, the SCRA provides certain protections to ease the burdens associated with these frequent moves.

As one such example, the SCRA limits the power of state and local authorities to levy taxes and fees on personal property owned by nonresident servicemembers and military spouses, including motor vehicles.² This provision is intended to free servicemembers and military

¹ See 50 U.S.C. § 3902.

² 50 U.S.C. § 4001 provides that "the personal property of a servicemember or the spouse of a servicemember shall not be deemed to be located or present in, or to have a situs for taxation in, the tax jurisdiction in which the servicemember is serving in compliance with military orders."

spouses from the burden of having to pay taxes or fees in jurisdictions where they are present solely in compliance with military orders.³

Nonetheless, the MVA website demonstrates that Maryland is subjecting servicemembers and their spouses to this nonresident vehicle permit fee. The “Plate Where You Live” page instructs residents who identify as being “in Maryland for a job, military service, or school” to register for a nonresident permit costing \$27. Similarly, the “Nonresident Vehicle Permits” page indicates that users will need a nonresident permit if “[y]our vehicle is registered in another state,” “[t]he vehicle will be kept in Maryland for 60 consecutive days or more,” and “[y]ou do not qualify to register the vehicle in Maryland,” and concludes that these criteria “commonly appl[y] to: . . . Military personnel stationed in Maryland.”⁴ Nowhere does the site mention an exemption from this fee for servicemembers or their spouses.

Though Maryland can require a nonresident servicemember or military spouse to acquire a nonresident permit for a vehicle that is registered out of state, it cannot require them to pay fees associated with that permit without violating the SCRA. We recommend that Maryland immediately take the following measures to comply with federal law:

1. Stop collecting the nonresident permit fee from servicemembers and military spouses;
2. Refund any amounts already collected from servicemembers and military spouses without charging additional processing fees;
3. Update MVA websites, training, procedures, and any other applicable materials to clearly communicate that servicemembers and military spouses are exempt from the nonresident permit fee going forward; and
4. Train frontline staff on the exemption for servicemembers and military spouses.

I encourage you to act on behalf of Maryland’s large military community in this matter.⁵ The Civil Rights Division and SVI remain committed to easing the burdens that our military families face, and I hope that you will join us in this fight.

As used in Section 4001, “the term ‘taxation’ includes licenses, fees, or excises imposed with respect to motor vehicles and their use[.]”

³ See *California v. Buzard*, 382 U.S. 386, 393 (1966) (holding that the SCRA barred California from imposing taxes and registration fees on a vehicle registered in another state).

⁴ See Plate Where You Live, <https://mva.maryland.gov/campaigns/plate-where-you-live> (last accessed September 3, 2026); Nonresident Vehicle Permits, <https://mva.maryland.gov/title-registration/title-vehicle/out-state-vehicles-staying-60-days> (last accessed September 3, 2026).

⁵ This letter is intended to inform Maryland authorities about the SCRA. The information in this document does not have the force and effect of law and is not meant to bind the public or Maryland in any way or to create any enforceable legal rights. This letter does not determine the outcome in any particular case or set of facts. In any investigation under the SCRA, the Civil Rights Division makes enforcement decisions based on the facts of that particular case.

SVI Director Patrick Scotti is ready to confer with attorneys in the Maryland Office of Attorney General about this pressing issue. Counsel may contact Mr. Scotti at patrick.scotti@usdoj.gov.

Regards,



Harmeet K. Dhillon
Assistant Attorney General
Civil Rights Division

cc:

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