



Written by [Ty Bodden](#) on August 6, 2026

## Narcissism: Vanity License Plates for Politicians

Former state legislators in the Hoosier State nearly received special license plates under a bill considered by the General Assembly — but it's only the latest bill conferring special privileges on legislators.

[Indiana House Bill 1122 \(2026\)](#) would have authorized special license plates for former state legislators who served at least five terms in the state House, three terms in the state Senate, or 12 total years in the General Assembly. The bill passed the House on February 2 by a [63-15 vote](#) before failing in the Senate on February 24 by a [17-31 vote](#). Although HB1122 ultimately failed, it was not an isolated proposal. Indiana already issues special plates to current members and spouses of the General Assembly.



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## Political Privilege Across the Country

Similar legislation granting current or former lawmakers distinctive license plates unavailable to ordinary citizens has been considered or enacted in other states in recent years.

[Delaware House Bill 85 \(2023\)](#), for example, created “retired state legislator” plates for former lawmakers who served at least 10 years. Eligible former legislators pay only a one-time \$10 administrative fee in addition to the regular registration charge, with no additional annual plate fee. Meanwhile, [New York Senate Bill 5355 \(2025-2026\)](#), which has not passed out of committee, would authorize plates bearing the words “Retired NYS Legislator” for any retired member of the Legislature. The New York proposal, which carries a \$25 annual service charge, has been introduced in various forms during every legislative session since 2017-2018.

[Illinois House Bill 3578 \(2023\)](#) revised the state’s special-plate program for current and retired members of the General Assembly or Congress, including provisions for legislative plates displaying the International Symbol of Access. A slightly older South Carolina measure, [House Bill 4973 \(2018\)](#), expanded former lawmakers’ eligibility for special plates and allowed qualifying former members to receive two plates. It became law after the Legislature overrode Governor Henry McMaster’s veto.

## Benefiting Themselves

James Madison anticipated the danger of lawmakers using their authority to benefit themselves. In [The Federalist, No. 57](#), he asked, “What is to restrain the House of Representatives from making legal discriminations in favor of themselves and a particular class of the society?” Special legislative plates may be largely symbolic, but they nevertheless create an official distinction between the political class and the citizens whom its members are supposed to serve.

[Proponents](#) claim that special license plates for former legislators honor public service, but such



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measures elevate politicians to a status above that of ordinary citizens. This shift undermines the core principle of public service as a civic responsibility rather than a privilege. Ultimately, lawmakers should prioritize the interests of the public over their own recognition.

## **Public Servants, Not a Privileged Class**

These plates may not confer the substantial financial benefits associated with pensions, tax exemptions, or legislative immunity, but they still represent government-created recognition for the political class. In a constitutional republic, legislators are public servants, not a privileged caste, making these plates un-American, undermining our [founding principles](#).

John Adams [expressed this](#) principle in his 1780 draft of the Massachusetts Constitution: “Government is instituted for the common good ... and not for the profit, honor, or private interest of any one man, family, or class of men.” Creating special government-issued status symbols for lawmakers conflicts with this founding principle by using public authority to bestow honor upon a favored political class.

Specialty plates may make sense for members of other civic organizations, but not elected public servants. Rather than creating status symbols for themselves and their former colleagues, lawmakers should devote their time to protecting liberty, reducing government, and ensuring that elected officials live under the same rules as the citizens they represent.



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