



Elaine M. Howle State Auditor

CONTACT: Margarita Fernández | (916) 445-0255 x 343 | MargaritaF@auditor.ca.gov

## Department of Motor Vehicles

### Administrative and Statutory Changes Will Improve Its Ability to Detect and Deter Misuse of Disabled Person Parking Placards

#### Background

People with disabilities can park free in metered spaces, for unlimited time in parking spaces with posted time limitations, and in designated parking spaces. The Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) offers special license plates and three types of placards for people with qualifying disabilities: temporary, travel, and permanent. People with permanent qualifying disabilities can receive a blue permanent placard and a license plate. Local parking enforcement officials routinely patrol communities and DMV investigates placard fraud and misuse. Heavy penalties—including fines and misdemeanor convictions—can be applied for misusing placards.

#### Our Key Recommendations

To improve DMV's management of placards or plates, the Legislature should:

- Require DMV to seek the assistance of health boards and conduct quarterly audits of applications for placards or plates.
- Require DMV to use the federal death master file to inform its efforts to identify deceased placard holders and cancel their placards.

The DMV should do the following:

- Establish goals regarding the number of sting operations its district offices should perform each quarter.
- Develop and implement an application, database, or other technology to allow local parking enforcement officials to have immediate access to placard status information.

#### Key Findings

- We reviewed 96 applications that DMV approved for disabled person parking placards and plates and found that its process is inadequate to ensure applications are legitimate.
  - » Most medical providers did not include enough information on applications when certifying disabilities—73% of the applications we reviewed did not fully describe the disability as required.
  - » When determining their validity and approving applications, DMV does not work with the appropriate health boards that license medical providers.
  - » The medical provider's signature on 18% of the applications did not match the signature on file with the appropriate licensing health board.
  - » Some medical providers that certified the applicant's disability were not authorized to do so.
- DMV has not canceled permanent placards for thousands of individuals who are likely deceased. Although DMV performs a monthly match between state vital records and permanent placard holders, it does not do so with federal records—we identified 35,000 likely matches when we compared placard records to the federal death master file.
- Although DMV's district offices conduct sting operations to identify placard misuse, we found that district offices varied greatly in the number conducted—ranging from one to 18—over a three-year period because DMV has not set the number of sting operations its district offices must perform.
- Local parking enforcement officials cannot efficiently identify and seize placards that people are misusing— if they are not sworn officers, they must call local law enforcement dispatchers to verify a placard number.

#### Nearly 3 Million Disabled Person Parking Placards and Plates Were Active as of June 30, 2016

