STATE OF NEW YORK

7951--B

2025-2026 Regular Sessions

IN SENATE

May 14, 2025

Introduced by Sen. MAYER -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Finance -- committee discharged, bill amended, ordered reprinted as amended and recommitted to said committee -- recommitted to the Committee on Finance in accordance with Senate Rule 6, sec. 8 -- committee discharged, bill amended, ordered reprinted as amended and recommitted to said committee

AN ACT to amend the state finance law, the highway law and the vehicle and traffic law, in relation to establishing the native/pollinator planting fund, the pollinator highway program and creating distinctive native plant or pollinator license plates

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

Section 1. The state finance law is amended by adding a new section 99-uu to read as follows:

§ 99-uu. Native/pollinator planting fund. 1. There is hereby established in the joint custody of the commissioner of taxation and finance and the state comptroller a special fund to be known as the native/pollinator planting fund. It shall consist of amounts credited to the fund in accordance with this section.

2. The fund shall consist of: (a) revenue from appropriations or other money authorized by the state legislature and specifically designated to be credited to the fund; (b) interest earned on money in the fund; (c) state and federal grants for green infrastructure projects; and (d) revenue generated from the sale of a dedicated distinctive license plate featuring native plant or pollinator imagery. Amounts credited to the fund shall not be subject to further appropriation and any money remaining in the fund at the end of a fiscal year shall not revert to the general fund.

3. Money in the fund shall be expended to support the establishment and implementation of the program established under section sixty-seven

EXPLANATION--Matter in *italics* (underscored) is new; matter in brackets [-] is old law to be omitted.

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of the highway law, including grants to municipalities and partnerships with environmental organizations. Priority funding shall be given to projects demonstrating significant community and environmental benefits.

4. The department of transportation shall annually, not later than December thirty-first, report on the activity of the fund to: (a) the chairs of the senate and the assembly environmental conservation committees; (b) the chairs of the senate and the assembly transportation committees; and (c) the chairs of the senate finance and the assembly ways and means committees.

§ 2. The highway law is amended by adding a new section 67 to read as follows:

§ 67. Pollinator highway program. 1. The department shall establish a program to promote the cultivation and maintenance of native flowering plants, grasses and shrubs on land bordering state highways and on other public lands. The department shall establish objectives for the program including: (a) incorporating native plantings into green infrastructure solutions, such as rain gardens, bio-swales and permeable landscapes to reduce runoff, filter pollutants and improve water quality; (b) establishing and enhancing habitats for pollinators, including bees, butterflies and other beneficial insects by prioritizing plant species native to the region; and (c) utilizing native vegetation to improve soil health, sequester carbon and reduce the need for emissions-intensive maintenance activities such as mowing and pesticide applications.

2. The department, in consultation with the department of agriculture and markets, the department of environmental conservation and relevant environmental organizations, shall: (a) identify and prioritize suitable locations and areas that would benefit from improved stormwater management, reduced maintenance or enhanced biodiversity; (b) develop standards for selecting and maintaining plant species to ensure their ecological suitability, resilience and effectiveness in achieving the program's goals; (c) encourage the use of innovative stormwater management techniques that integrate native vegetation; and (d) coordinate with municipalities, regional planning agencies and environmental groups to implement pilot projects and community-based initiatives.

3. The department shall support the program's implementation by establishing: (a) grants to municipalities for designing and installing green infrastructure projects utilizing native plantings; (b) partnerships with local nurseries and landscapers to supply native plants and support job creation; (c) public-private partnerships to reduce costs and enhance the program's outreach; and (d) in consultation with the department of motor vehicles, a distinctive license plate featuring native plant or pollinator imagery, with the proceeds supporting the program's activities and grants to municipalities.

4. The department shall promote community engagement and education by: (a) developing and disseminating educational materials about the environmental, economic and health benefits of native plantings and stormwater management; (b) encouraging citizen involvement through volunteer programs, local workshops and monitoring initiatives; and (c) collaborating with school and community organizations to promote environmental stewardship and awareness.

5. The department shall establish measurable goals and metrics to assess the program's effectiveness, including: (a) the reduction in stormwater runoff and improvement in water quality; (b) increases in pollinator populations and biodiversity; (c) cost savings in maintenance and operations; and (d) annual reporting to the general public and the legislature on the program's progress.

6. The department shall promulgate rules and regulations to carry out the purposes of this section within one year of its effective date.

§ 3. The vehicle and traffic law is amended by adding a new section 404-ff to read as follows:

§ 404-ff. Distinctive native plant or pollinator license plates. 1. Any person residing in this state shall, upon request, be issued a distinctive native plant or pollinator license plate of a design approved by the commissioner, after consultation with the commissioner of environmental conservation and the commissioner of transportation. Application for such license plate shall be filed with the commissioner in such form and detail as the commissioner shall prescribe.

2. A distinctive native plant or pollinator plate issued pursuant to this section shall be issued in the same manner as other number plates upon the payment of the regular registration fees prescribed by section four hundred one of this article; provided, however, that an additional annual service charge of twenty-five dollars shall be charged for such plate. All monies received as annual service charges under this section shall be deposited to the credit of the native/pollinator planting fund established pursuant to section ninety-nine-uu of the state finance law; and shall be used to support the establishment and implementation of the pollinator highway program established under section sixty-seven of the highway law.

§ 4. 1. A distinctive plate established pursuant to section 404-ff of the vehicle and traffic law as added by section three of this act shall only be designed, produced and issued upon the delivery to the department of motor vehicles of a surety bond in the amount of $6,000, which shall be executed by a surety company authorized by the department of financial services to transact business in this state. Provided, however, that if the commissioner of motor vehicles shall have received prior to plate design, production and issuance at least two hundred orders for such distinctive plate together with the additional annual service charge applicable to each such order, which shall be non-refundable, no such surety bond shall be required. Any additional service charges collected pursuant to this section shall be deposited pursuant to the provisions of section ninety-nine-uu of the state finance law.

2. If, upon the expiration of two years following the date upon which distinctive plates in the series are first available for sale 200 or more sets of such plates are sold, a bond delivered pursuant to this section shall be discontinued. If fewer than 200 sets of such plates are sold by such time, the department of motor vehicles shall be entitled to recover against the bond in an amount proportionate to such shortfall.

§ 5. This act shall take effect immediately.