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# Harsher Penalties for Toll Skippers on PA Turnpike Takes Effect This Summer

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BY

75 PA. C.S. § 1380 ("Section 1380") will be taking effect this summer and will allow the PA Transportation Department to suspend the vehicle registration of motorists who fail to pay six or more violations for evading tolls on the Pennsylvania Turnpike. The new law also applies to bridges operated by the Delaware River Joint Toll Bridge Commission. Section 1380 was passed in an effort to recover the millions of dollars in unpaid tolls.

The problem started in recent years due to the increase in the use of electronic tolling. Motorists, mostly out-of-state drivers who do not have an E-ZPass account, drive through the unmanned E-ZPass lane without intending to pay. The Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission operates cameras that take pictures of license plates on vehicles moving through the E-ZPass lanes. The commission would then send out two letters to toll evaders, and if no payment is made the case is turned over to a collection agency. However, despite the collection agency's best efforts, the amount of written-off toll revenue has been increasing annually. The commission wrote off \$5.4 million in unpaid tolls in fiscal year 2015-2016, an increase of \$1.7 million from fiscal year 2014-2015. Around \$766 million in E-ZPass revenue was collected in the fiscal year 2015-2016.

The transportation department will charge an \$88 fee to restore the registration of any motor vehicle suspended under the law. In addition, the law allows the commission to enter reciprocal agreements with other toll agencies to pursue out-of-state violators. Section 1380 was floating around the legislation for several years, but interest sparked after a state auditor general's report, issued in September 2016, suggested that an increase in toll violations could create financial problems for the turnpike.

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