

Proposal for Personalized Auto License Plates for
Members of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.
In the State of Kansas

To The Chairman and Members of the Senate Transportation Committee,

I want to take this opportunity to thank the committee for the opportunity to testify in support of the HB to establish the personalized auto license plate for Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. for the state of Kansas

My name is Larry Burks Sr. and I am a retired Lieutenant Colonel (United States Army – Persian Gulf War Veteran) and currently a 40 plus year, financial member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. I currently reside in Wichita, KS and have served in numerous positions of leadership in the community and with the fraternity at the undergraduate and the alumni levels, most recently as the 28th Eighth District Representative from 2003 to 2006. I was a member of the fraternity's Supreme Council, a representative of Grand Basileus (National President) of the fraternity with the responsibility for managing all operations of the fraternity in an eight state area which included Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri, Iowa, Colorado, New Mexico, North Dakota and South Dakota, representing 23 graduate chapters, 16 undergraduate chapters and 15,000 members. I am still a member of the District's Executive Leadership Body as a past District Representative, assisting the current District Representative in the management of the district. I wish to address the committee concerning this issue as I represent all members in the state of Kansas who wish to have this distinctive tag to show pride in our organization, support of its programs and our pride as citizens of the great state of Kansas. I wish to do this by outlining key components of the proposed legislation.

Purpose. To gain approval for personalized auto license plates for citizens of the state of Kansas who are members of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.

Organization. Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. is the first international fraternal organization to be founded on the campus of a historically black college. Omega Psi Phi was founded on November 17, 1911, at Howard University in Washington, D.C. The founders were three Howard University undergraduates, Edgar Amos Love, Oscar James Cooper and Frank Coleman. Joining them was their faculty adviser, Dr. Ernest Everett Just.

From the initials of the Greek phrase meaning, "friendship is essential to the soul," the name Omega Psi Phi was derived. That phrase was selected as the motto. Manhood, Scholarship, Perseverance and Uplift were adopted as Cardinal Principles. Omega Psi Phi was incorporated under the laws of the District of Columbia on October 28, 1914.

Omega has built a strong and effective force of men dedicated to its cardinal principles of manhood, scholarship, perseverance, and uplift through community leadership and their commitment to the tenants upon which the fraternity were founded. Its Internationally Mandated Programs include:

Achievement Week - observed each November and is designed to recognize those individuals at the local and international levels who have contributed to community uplift. A High School Essay Contest is to be held in conjunction with Achievement Week.

Scholarship - promotes academic excellence among the undergraduate members. Graduate chapters provide financial assistance to student members and non-members.

Social Action Programs - Chapters participate in activities that will uplift their communities. Some of the activities include: voter registration, Assault on Illiteracy; Habitat for Humanity; mentoring; and participation in fundraisers for charitable organizations.

Talent Hunt Program - provides exposure, encouragement and financial assistance to talented young people participating in the performing arts. Winners are awarded recognition and may be given college scholarships.

Memorial Program - March 12th of each year chapters conduct an appropriate service to recall the memory of those members who have entered into Omega Chapter.

Reclamation and Retention - A concerted effort at the international, district and local levels to retain active brothers and return inactive brothers to full participatory status.

College Endowment Fund - Each year the fraternity gives at least \$50,000 to historically black college and universities in furtherance of Omega's commitment to provide philanthropic support.

Health Initiative - Chapters facilitate, participate and coordinate activities that promote good health practices. Some of the programs are the Charles Drew Blood Drive and partnership with the American Diabetes Association.

Voter Registration, Education and Mobilization - Chapters facilitate and participate in activities that uplift their communities through the power of the vote.

NAACP - Every district and chapter of the fraternity is required to maintain a Life Membership at Large in the NAACP. All members of the fraternity are encouraged to join the NAACP.

Mission. Omega Psi Phi Fraternity exists throughout the United States and numerous locations throughout the world. Their overall mission is geared to improving the status of the communities in which they exist through conducting social action programs which enhance the culture, well-being and quality of life of their communities. Alumni members of the fraternity have life-long commitment to their respective chapters because membership does not end after their graduation from college. They represent all walks of life from education, the military, government services (all levels, federal, state and local), law enforcement, corporate America and so much more.

Kansas Membership. In the state of Kansas, six alumni chapters of Omega Psi Phi are in the following cities: Topeka, Lawrence, Manhattan-Junction City-Fort Riley, Fort Leavenworth, Wichita, and Kansas City, Kansas. There are chapters for five undergraduate chapters at the following institutions of higher learning – University of Kansas, Kansas State University, Emporia State University, Wichita State University and Washburn University. Members of these organizations reside, state-wide and are connected by membership to graduate and undergraduate chapters in these major metropolitan areas. In the state of Kansas, these chapters represent a membership base of 1,500 alumni and undergraduate members. Alumni chapters have been operating in Kansas communities as early as 1949. Several members hold alumni level leadership offices at the state, regional and national/international levels. There will be no problem in guaranteeing the minimum of 500 for these license plates.

Community Service. Members of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity participate in community service programs ranging from Habitat for Humanity projects; health initiative programs supporting diabetes prevention, breast cancer, hypertension, and numerous ailments which impact communities; raise money to grant scholarships for graduating high school students in need; assist with social service projects for the elderly; help with special needs children and supporting programs; champion reading program and related early childhood development initiatives; manage mentor and tutoring programs in public schools and with organizations such as the Boys and Girls Clubs, they put in numerous volunteer hours for community service projects; they are respected members of their communities and make a difference in the lives of thousands of people, for the better. These are part of the mandated programs identified above for all active chapters of the fraternity. Individual chapters raise money to fund these programs by various means which include golf tournaments, bingo, membership dues and limited contributions from businesses. We have the potential to do more if more funding would be available to carry out the full mandates of our programs.

Application Process. The application process for purchase of these tags will be governed by the rules currently in place by the state of Kansas for customized license plates. An application will be submitted to the Kansas Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Tag Application Office (to be established in Wichita) where validation of the applicant's membership is required to qualify for purchasing the tag. This will be done by coordination with the fraternity's international headquarters which maintains an active membership database for all members in the state.

Purpose of Revenue. The revenue generated from the sale of these personalized plates will be used to fund scholarships for graduating high school students who apply for the standing scholarships offered by the six alumni chapters in the state, and the social action programs which are mandated by the international headquarters of the fraternity. We wish to expand youth membership programs under our mandated programs umbrella and this funding will be able to allow this to happen. Given the number of members state-wide, the potential for recurring annual renewal of these personalized plates is unlimited.

Additional Information. Missouri, Texas, Oklahoma, and Illinois (states in our immediate area) and other locations throughout the United States (Mississippi, Alabama, Virginia, California, The District of Columbia to name a few) have these personalized auto license plates; residents in the state of Kansas wish to show their pride in the state and pride in their organization with this program. This will be a successful endeavor for the state of Kansas when approved.

To illustrate the full impact of the fraternity's work in Kansas communities, attached is a copy of the 2013 submission from the Wichita, Kansas chapter to the Eighth District's Annual Meeting which earned the District's recognition as Social Action Chapter of the Year.

Additionally, a sample of the proposed license plates is provided as an enclosure to this proposal.

I strongly request approval of this proposed legislation.

Due to work obligations I am unable to be present today for this hearing but would be willing to address the committee by phone if desired.

I am the point of contact for this action:

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The 28th Eighth District Representative, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.
Past President, Greater Wichita Pan Hellenic Council (2013 – 2014)

Financial Member, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. (since 1974)

Thank you very much for your time and attention on this proposed legislation.

Two Attachments:

2013 Social Action Chapter of the Year submission – Gamma Upsilon Chapter, Wichita, KS
Proposed Customized License Plate