

§ 20-37.6. Parking privileges for handicapped drivers and passengers.

(a) General Parking. – Any vehicle that is driven by or is transporting a person who is handicapped and that displays a distinguishing license plate, a removable windshield placard, or a temporary removable windshield placard may be parked for unlimited periods in parking zones restricted as to the length of time parking is permitted. This provision has no application to those zones or during times in which the stopping, parking, or standing of all vehicles is prohibited or which are reserved for special types of vehicles. Any qualifying vehicle may park in spaces designated as restricted to vehicles driven by or transporting the handicapped.

(b) Distinguishing License Plates. – If the registered owner of a vehicle is handicapped or the registered owner certifies that the registered owner is the guardian or parent of a handicapped person, the registered owner may apply for and display a distinguishing license plate. This license plate shall be issued for the normal fee applicable to standard license plates. Any vehicle owner who qualifies for a distinguishing license plate shall be notified by the Division at the time the plate is issued that the applicant is also eligible to receive one removable windshield placard and, upon request, shall be issued a placard at that time. A vehicle with a distinguishing license plate may be lawfully used when a handicapped person is not a driver or passenger so long as the vehicle is not using handicapped privileges including parking in a space designated with a sign pursuant to subsection (d) of this section.

(c) Distinguishing Placards. – A handicapped person may apply for the issuance of a removable windshield placard or a temporary removable windshield placard. Upon request, one additional placard may be issued to applicants who do not have a distinguishing license plate. Any organization which, as determined and certified by the State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, regularly transports handicapped persons may also apply. These organizations may receive one removable windshield placard for each transporting vehicle. When the removable windshield or temporary removable windshield placard is properly displayed, all parking rights and privileges extended to vehicles displaying a distinguishing license plate issued pursuant to subsection (b) shall apply. The removable windshield placard or the temporary removable windshield placard shall be displayed so that it may be viewed from the front and rear of the vehicle by hanging it from the front windshield rearview mirror of a vehicle using a parking space allowed for handicapped persons. When there is no inside rearview mirror, or when the placard cannot reasonably be hung from the rearview mirror by the handicapped person, the placard shall be displayed on the driver's side of the dashboard. A removable windshield placard placed on a motorized wheelchair or similar vehicle shall be displayed in a clearly visible location. The Division shall establish procedures for the issuance of the placards and may charge a fee sufficient to pay the actual cost of issuance, but in no event less than five dollars (\$5.00) per placard. The Division shall issue a placard registration card with each placard issued to a handicapped person. The registration card shall bear the name of the person to whom the placard is issued, the person's address, the placard number, and an expiration date. The registration card shall be in the vehicle in which the placard is being used, and the person to whom the placard is issued shall be the operator or a passenger in the vehicle in which the placard is displayed.

(c1) Application and Renewal; Medical Certification. – The initial application for a distinguishing license plate, removable windshield placard, or temporary removable windshield placard shall be accompanied by a certification of a licensed physician, a licensed ophthalmologist, a licensed optometrist, a licensed physician assistant, a licensed nurse practitioner, or the Division of Services for the Blind that the applicant or person in the applicant's custody or care is handicapped or by a disability determination by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs that the applicant or person in the applicant's custody or care is handicapped. For an initial application for a temporary removable windshield placard only, the certification that the applicant is handicapped may be made by a licensed certified nurse midwife. The application for a temporary removable windshield placard shall contain additional certification

to include the period of time the certifying authority determines the applicant will have the disability. Distinguishing license plates shall be renewed annually, but subsequent applications shall not require a medical certification that the applicant is handicapped, except that a registered owner that certified pursuant to subsection (b) of this section that the registered owner is the guardian or parent of a handicapped person must recertify every five years. Removable windshield placards shall be renewed every five years, and, except for a person certified as totally and permanently disabled at the time of the initial application or a prior renewal under this subsection, the renewal shall require a medical recertification that the person is handicapped; provided that a medical certification shall not be required to renew any placard that expires after the person to whom it is issued is 80 years of age. Temporary removable windshield placards shall expire no later than six months after issuance. The Division shall offer renewal of handicapped credentials in person and online on the Division's website.

(c2) Existing Placards; Expiration; Exchange for New Placards. – All existing placards shall expire on January 1, 1992. No person shall be convicted of parking in violation of this Article by reason of an expired placard if the defendant produces in court, at the time of trial on the illegal parking charge, an expired placard and a renewed placard issued within 30 days of the expiration date of the expired placard and which would have been a defense to the charge had it been issued prior to the time of the alleged offense. Existing placards issued on or after July 1, 1989, may be exchanged without charge for the new placards.

(c3) It shall be unlawful to sell a distinguishing license plate, a removable windshield placard, or a temporary removable windshield placard issued pursuant to this section. A violation of this subsection shall be a Class 2 misdemeanor and may be punished pursuant to G.S. 20-176(c) and (c1).

(d) Designation of Parking Spaces. – Designation of parking spaces for handicapped persons on streets and public vehicular areas shall comply with G.S. 136-30. A sign designating a parking space for handicapped persons shall state the maximum penalty for parking in the space in violation of the law. For purposes of this section, a parking space designated for handicapped persons includes clearly marked access aisles, and all provisions, restrictions, and penalties applicable to parking in spaces designated for handicapped persons also apply to clearly marked access aisles.

(d1) Repealed by Session Laws 1991, c. 530, s. 4.

(e) Enforcement of Handicapped Parking Privileges. – It shall be unlawful:

- (1) To park or leave standing any vehicle in a space designated with a sign pursuant to subsection (d) of this section for handicapped persons when the vehicle does not display the distinguishing license plate, removable windshield placard, temporary removable windshield placard as provided in this section, a disabled veteran registration plate issued under G.S. 20-79.4, or a partially disabled veteran registration plate issued under G.S. 20-79.4;
- (2) For any person not qualifying for the rights and privileges extended to handicapped persons under this section to exercise or attempt to exercise such rights or privileges by the unauthorized use of a distinguishing license plate, removable windshield placard, or temporary removable windshield placard issued pursuant to the provisions of this section;
- (3) To park or leave standing any vehicle so as to obstruct a curb ramp or curb cut for handicapped persons as provided for by the North Carolina Building Code or as designated in G.S. 136-44.14;
- (4) For those responsible for designating parking spaces for the handicapped to erect or otherwise use signs not conforming to G.S. 20-37.6(d) for this purpose.

This section is enforceable in all public vehicular areas.

(f) Penalties for Violation. –

- (1) A violation of G.S. 20-37.6(e)(1), (2) or (3) is an infraction which carries a penalty of at least one hundred dollars (\$100.00) but not more than two hundred fifty dollars (\$250.00) and whenever evidence shall be presented in any court of the fact that any automobile, truck, or other vehicle was found to be parked in a properly designated handicapped parking space in violation of the provisions of this section, it shall be prima facie evidence in any court in the State of North Carolina that the vehicle was parked and left in the space by the person, firm, or corporation in whose name the vehicle is registered and licensed according to the records of the Division. No evidence tendered or presented under this authorization shall be admissible or competent in any respect in any court or tribunal except in cases concerned solely with a violation of this section.
- (2) A violation of G.S. 20-37.6(e)(4) is an infraction which carries a penalty of at least one hundred dollars (\$100.00) but not more than two hundred fifty dollars (\$250.00) and whenever evidence shall be presented in any court of the fact that a nonconforming sign is being used it shall be prima facie evidence in any court in the State of North Carolina that the person, firm, or corporation with ownership of the property where the nonconforming sign is located is responsible for violation of this section. Building inspectors and others responsible for North Carolina State Building Code violations specified in G.S. 143-138(h) where such signs are required by the Handicapped Section of the North Carolina State Building Code, may cause a citation to be issued for this violation and may also initiate any appropriate action or proceeding to correct such violation.
- (3) A law-enforcement officer, including a company police officer commissioned by the Attorney General under Chapter 74E of the General Statutes, or a campus police officer commissioned by the Attorney General under Chapter 74G of the General Statutes, may cause a vehicle parked in violation of this section to be towed. The officer is a legal possessor as provided in G.S. 20-161(d)(2). The officer shall not be held to answer in any civil or criminal action to any owner, lienholder or other person legally entitled to the possession of any motor vehicle removed from a space pursuant to this section, except where the motor vehicle is willfully, maliciously, or negligently damaged in the removal from the space to a place of storage.
- (4) Notwithstanding any other provision of the General Statutes, the provisions of this section relative to handicapped parking shall be enforced by State, county, city and other municipal authorities in their respective jurisdictions whether on public or private property in the same manner as is used to enforce other parking laws and ordinances by said agencies. (1971, c. 374, s. 1; 1973, cc. 126, 1384; 1977, c. 340, s. 2; 1979, c. 632; 1981, c. 682, s. 7; 1983, c. 326, ss. 1, 2; 1985, c. 249; c. 586; c. 764, s. 24; 1985 (Reg. Sess., 1986), c. 852, s. 17; 1987, c. 843; 1989, c. 760, s. 3; 1989 (Reg. Sess., 1990), c. 1052, ss. 1-3.1; 1991, c. 411, s. 2; c. 530, s. 4; c. 672, s. 5; c. 726, s. 23; c. 761, s. 5; 1991 (Reg. Sess., 1992), c. 1007, s. 30; c. 1043, s. 4; 1993, c. 373, s. 1; 1994, Ex. Sess., c. 14, s. 31; 1999-265, s. 1; 2005-231, s. 11; 2009-493, s. 2; 2015-22, s. 1; 2015-29, s. 1; 2016-25, ss. 1, 2; 2017-111, s. 1; 2018-77, s. 4; 2019-199, s. 8; 2019-213, s. 1(b); 2021-185, s. 8.)