

Hub pol eyes auto-matic fines for car plate cheats

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In a bid to prop up sagging city finances, a Boston city councilor wants to crack down on people who flaunt a state law requiring they register their cars here, cheating the city of more than \$1 million in excise taxes.

Councilor Rob Consalvo would like to set up a toll-free snitch line and whack scofflaws with a \$500 fine to punish cheaters and replenish the city's coffers.

"There's more than \$1 million in untapped excise revenue," Consalvo of Hyde Park said.

"In a budget crisis, we should go after every dollar available."

Under his plan, the Boston Transportation Department would pass the hotline tips to meter maids, who would track down cars and issue warnings that state law gives them 30 days to register in Massachusetts.

Students have 30 days to notify local police their out-of-state plated car is in the city.

The owner would get hit with the fine if there's a second complaint within 30 days.

Haverhill and Lawrence instituted similar programs to go after cheats, as have cities in California, Georgia and Nevada, Consalvo said.

Massachusetts has its own toll-free tip line but Consalvo claims the state's focus is on catching excise evaders on the New Hampshire border.

Declining excise tax revenues are part of the reason Boston faces a \$103 million budget deficit.

Excise taxes are expected to be off 11 percent, or \$4.5 million, as people put off purchasing new cars.

Still, Mayor **Thomas M. Menino** doesn't back the plan because it duplicates the state's effort.

Spokeswoman Dot Joyce said the mayor encourages people to call the state tip line.

As Menino warns of massive layoffs, watchdog Sam Tyler, president of the Boston Municipal Research Bureau, said the city shouldn't scoff at ways to raise money.

"I think at a time when the financial situation is challenging . . . the city needs to show it's taking steps