



House
Legislative
Analysis
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"PEACE TIME" VETERANS' LICENSE PLATES

House Bill 4202 as introduced First Analysis (2-20-97)

Sponsor: Rep. Paul Baade
**Committee: Senior Citizens and Veterans
Affairs**

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Since 1982, when the legislature amended the Michigan Vehicle Code to authorize special license plates to honor ex-prisoners-of-war, Michigan has authorized special license plates for veterans of a number of wars or campaigns, disabled veterans, combat wounded veterans, and members of the Michigan National Guard or United States armed forces reserve. Currently, the vehicle code also has a kind of "catch all" provision that took effect on December 18, 1992, and that authorizes special license plates for members of the Michigan National Guard, the United States Armed Forces reserve, or any branch of the armed services of the United States who were called to active duty during a declared war or an armed conflict in which the United States was a participant.

Under the Michigan Vehicle Code, vehicles owned and used by the civil air patrol and by certain nonprofit groups qualify for special license plates which cost \$10 per plate and which must be renewed once every five years. A vehicle with this special "Y" (nonprofit organization) plate must be used exclusively for the purposes of the particular group that owns it and carry signs identifying the group's name. Among the nonprofit organizations eligible for this special plate are nonprofit veterans organizations whose vehicles are used strictly in parades and civic events. At the request of the West Michigan Veterans, Inc., the vehicle code was amended (by Public Act 395 of 1994) to add nonprofit veterans centers to the list of nonprofit organizations eligible for the special "Y" license plate. The West Michigan Veterans center also built a veterans' memorial park which honors all veterans, both war veterans and peace time veterans. Reportedly, as peace time veterans became aware of their inclusion in the memorial park, they began asking why they, too, should not be allowed to have special veterans' license plates. Legislation has been introduced that would address this issue.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would add a new subsection to the Michigan Vehicle Code (MCL 257.803i) that would allow anyone

who was a member of any branch of the armed services of the United States, who had retired or been granted an honorable discharge, and who wasn't otherwise eligible for a special license ("registration") plate under the vehicle code to apply to the secretary of state for a special license plate that would display an appropriate vignette preceding the registration number.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The various specialty license plates, including special veterans' plates, are authorized in Chapter VII of the Michigan Vehicle Code ("Registration Fees"). More specifically, section 803 authorizes special plates for manufacturers, transporters or dealers, while subsequently lettered sections authorize special license plates as follows:

- ** 803a, historic motor vehicles;
- ** 803b, personalized ("vanity") plates;
- ** 803d, handicapper plates;
- ** 803e, ex-POW, World War I veteran, Pearl Harbor survivor, Purple Heart medal recipient (combat wounded veteran);
- ** 803f, disabled veteran;
- ** 803g, member of the United States Congress;
- ** 803h, handicapper tabs;
- ** 803i, Michigan National Guard or military reserve member;
- ** 803j, Korean War veteran;
- ** 803k, Vietnam War veteran;
- ** 803l, World War II veteran;

** 803m, special (fraternal or public service) organizations;

** 803n, Persian Gulf War, Grenada, Panama, and Lebanon conflicts; and

** 803o, any national guard, armed services, or reserve member on active duty during a declared war or armed conflict in which the United States was a participant.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

Fiscal information is not available.

ARGUMENTS:

For:

It is only fair that all veterans who serve their country honorably be appropriately recognized. As a representative of the West Michigan Veterans' center pointed out to the House Committee on Senior Citizens and Veterans Affairs, Michigan has a long tradition of honoring its veterans. In addition to the various special license plates, Michigan has a (now constitutionally protected) veterans' trust fund, it has awarded bonuses for war veterans, and is one of only a handful of states that waives its income tax requirements for its citizens who are on active military duty outside the state. Reportedly, the so-called "peace time" veterans who visited the veterans' memorial park built in Muskegon County have been surprised and grateful to be included among the veterans honored in the park, since they usually do not receive such recognition alongside their war-time comrades. They have asked that they, too, be allowed the option of obtaining special veterans license plates, an option now available only to war-time veterans. While virtually all states recognize their veterans through special license plates, none so far honors their peace time veterans (some of whom currently are serving as peace keepers in Bosnia, for example) with special license plates. The bill would do this, making Michigan the first state in the country to honor all of its veterans, not just its war-time veterans.

POSITIONS:

The Michigan American Legion supports the bill. (2-19-97)

West Michigan Veterans, Inc. (a private, non-profit service organization in Muskegon County) supports the bill. (2-19-97)

Analyst: S. Ekstrom

■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.