

CHILDREN'S MEMORIAL DAY

House Bill 4273 (Substitute H-2) First Analysis (6-26-01)

Sponsor: Rep. A. T. Frank
**Committee: Family and Children
Services**

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

The Child Welfare League of America (CWA) is an 80-year-old association of public and private nonprofit agencies that help abused and neglected children and youth and their families. As part of a national initiative to reduce child mortality, the league began a public awareness campaign a few years ago to bring attention to the shamefully high number of violent children's deaths in this country. According to an article by CWA, published on their web site, the U.S. is the highest among the world's top 26 industrialized countries in homicides against children and youth under age 15 (*Children's Memorial Flag Calls Attention to Child Deaths in U.S.*, www.cwla.org). At the center of the initiative is a moving image -- a red flag depicting blue, paper doll-like figures of children holding hands. In the middle, a white chalk-like outline of a missing child symbolizes the children who have been lost to violence.

Over the past few years, the fourth Friday of April has come to be known as National Children's Memorial Flag Day, and the CWA reports that the flag has been flown by more than 30 governors on that day, when child advocacy agencies and organizations promote the actions needed to stop preventable deaths of children. These include protecting children from guns by unloading and locking guns and ammunition separately; strengthening child protection services; providing after-school programs as safe havens for children; and funding drug treatment for addicted parents.

Meanwhile, in Michigan, Matthew North, a sophomore at Heritage High School near Saginaw, contacted his state representative on this issue. Matthew had lost a classmate to a fatal disease, and pointed out that, although there is a Memorial Day to acknowledge and recognize those who have lost their lives in the line of military duty, and a Workers' Memorial Day, instituted by the United Auto Workers (UAW) to honor and recognize workers killed at work, no day is set aside to recognize those

children who die tragic deaths each year. As a result of Matthew's initiative and efforts by Michigan's Children, a child advocacy organization, legislation has been introduced to establish a Children's Memorial Day in Michigan. It is proposed that this day be the fourth Friday in April of each year, to coincide with the National Children's Memorial Flag Day.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would create an act to designate the fourth Friday in April each year as Children's Memorial Day in Michigan, to commemorate the fact that each year a great number of children and youth under age 20 commit suicide, are homicide victims, or die from accidents; and that many more children die from illness.

The bill would specify that the legislature "encourages individuals, educational institutions, and social, community, religious, labor, and business organizations to pause on Children's Memorial Day and reflect upon the precious resources that our children constitute and the great loss we suffer when we lose our children".

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

According to the House Fiscal Agency, the bill has no fiscal impact. (6-22-01)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The bill constitutes an attempt to gain public attention for the issue of violence against children. The scandalously high number of children's deaths has shocked this country into action over the past few years. Police and security officers have been installed in schools, teachers and school administrators have consulted with psychiatrists and behavioral experts, and schools have implemented

stricter rules against any type of violence exhibited by the children themselves, whether real or perceived. However, at the same time, as the state implements budget cuts, there may be a move toward reducing programs designed to help children. As a result, a day set aside as Children's Memorial Day could serve as symbol of the need to improve efforts to protect children.

Response:

There is a growing movement nationally toward recognizing the fourth Friday in April as Children's Memorial Flag Day. In recent years, more than half the nation's governors have participated by flying the flag, arranging special ceremonies, and convening representatives of groups that are committed to protecting children. These efforts have heightened public awareness of the need for communities to help vulnerable children. It would make sense for Michigan to join this movement and designate the day as Children's Memorial Flag Day.

Reply:

In Michigan, rules governing the display of flags would prohibit flying this special flag on the state Capitol building. However, the flag *is* used on Children's Memorial Day as a symbol to mark the day, and the bill would designate fourth Friday in April of each year as Children's Memorial Day in recognition of the national movement.

POSITIONS:

Michigan's Children supports the bill. (6-20-01)

Analyst: R. Young

■ 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.