



Senate Fiscal Agency
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Senate Bill 102 (Substitute S-3 as passed by the Senate)
Sponsor: Senator John Pappageorge
Committee: Transportation

(as enrolled)

Date Completed: 5-11-11

RATIONALE

The Michigan Vehicle Code provides for a number of special license plates honoring military service members, veterans of declared wars or conflicts, veterans who were wounded in combat, and former prisoners of war, among others. Each special plate is similar in design to the standard Michigan plate, but with a designation indicating the nature of the individual's military service. For example, the license plate for a veteran who was wounded in combat carries an emblem of the Purple Heart medal on the left-hand side and the words "combat wounded veteran" across the bottom. While many of those plates are available to the spouse of a veteran or member of the armed services, no similar plate exists for family members of soldiers who have died in combat. It has been suggested that such a license plate be created.

CONTENT

The bill would amend the Michigan Vehicle Code to permit a "Gold Star family member" to apply to the Secretary of State (SOS) for a Gold Star Family special registration plate.

"Gold Star family member" would mean a person who has had an immediate family member die while serving in the United States Armed Forces, or in forces incorporated as part of the United States Armed Forces, if the immediate family member met any of the Federal eligibility criteria for a Gold Star Lapel Button. (Those criteria are described below, under **BACKGROUND.**)

The plate would have to be inscribed with special identification numbers preceded by a gold star and would have to have the words "Gold Star Family" inscribed beneath the registration number.

The Code permits a person who was a prisoner of war, World War I veteran, Pearl Harbor survivor, or Purple Heart medal recipient to apply to the SOS for a special registration plate. (Please see **BACKGROUND** for a full list of additional special registration plates for veterans of other wars and conflicts.)

The application must be on a form prescribed by the SOS and must be accompanied by a \$5 service fee and proof that the applicant was a prisoner of war, World War I veteran, Pearl Harbor survivor, or recipient of the Purple Heart. A person issued a special registration plate must be assessed the applicable registration fee.

The bill would extend those provisions a Gold Star family member. The application would have to be accompanied by proof of the applicant's relationship to the deceased.

The bill would take effect on July 1, 2011.

MCL 257.803e

BACKGROUND

Gold Star Lapel Button Eligibility Criteria

Under the U.S. Code, a Gold Star Lapel Button may be used to identify widows and widowers, parents, and next of kin of the following members of the Armed Forces:

- Those who lost their lives during World War I, World War II, or any subsequent period of armed hostilities in which the U.S. was engaged before July 1, 1958.
- Those who lost or lose their lives after June 30, 1958, while engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States, or while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict in which the U.S. is not a belligerent party against an opposing armed force.
- Those who lost or lose their lives after March 28, 1973, as a result of an international terrorist attack against the U.S. or a foreign nation friendly to the U.S., or as a result of military operations while serving outside the U.S. as part of a peacekeeping force.

The term "parents" includes mother, father, stepmother, stepfather, mother or father through adoption, and foster parents who stood in loco parentis. "Next of kin" includes only children, brothers, sisters, half brothers, and half sisters. "Children" includes stepchildren and children through adoption.

Military & Veteran Specialty License Plates

The Secretary of State currently offers vehicle registration plates for the military service members and veterans shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Special Registration Plate	Authorizing Section
Afghanistan Conflict Veteran	803o
Air Force Veteran	803i
Army Veteran	803i
Coast Guard Veteran	803i
Combat Wounded Veteran (Purple Heart)	803e
Cuban Missile Crisis Veteran	803o
Disabled Veteran	803f
Dominican Republic Veteran	803o
Ex-Prisoner of War	803e
Grenada Conflict Veteran	803n
Iraq Conflict Veteran	803o
Korean War Veteran	803j
Laos Conflict Veteran	803o
Lebanon Conflict Veteran	803n
Marine Corps Veteran	803i
Medal of Honor Recipient	217d
Military Reserve Member or Veteran	803i
National Guard Member or Veteran	803i

Navy Veteran	803i
Panama Conflict Veteran	803n
Pearl Harbor Survivor	803e
Persian Gulf (Desert Storm) Veteran	803n
Somalia Conflict Veteran	803o
Vietnam War Veteran	803k
World War I Veteran	803e
World War II Veteran	803l

The Michigan Vehicle Code allows a spouse to apply for a special registration plate in the case of ex-prisoners of war and veterans of the Korean War, Vietnam War, World War II, Persian Gulf War, and the conflicts in Granada, Lebanon, and Panama. (In the case of a spouse of a Persian Gulf War veteran, the veteran must have been called to active duty.) Special plates also are available to the spouse of a veteran of the Michigan National Guard, the U.S. Armed Forces Reserve, or any branch of the U.S. armed services who was called to active duty during a declared war or an armed conflict in which the United States was a participant.

ARGUMENTS

(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)

Supporting Argument

The custom of honoring fallen soldiers with a gold star dates at least back to World War I. During that war, families of those serving in the military typically displayed service flags bearing one blue star for each living service member. If a family member was killed in the line of duty, the blue star was replaced with a gold star.

In keeping with that tradition, the Gold Star Mothers organization was created by Grace Darling Seibold after she lost a son in World War I. She created the Gold Star Mothers to provide support to other mothers of fallen soldiers and to help care for wounded veterans coming home from the war. In 1928, the organization was officially incorporated as the American Gold Star Mothers, Inc., named after the gold stars on service flags honoring fallen soldiers.

The Gold Star Family license plate would continue the tradition of honoring the sacrifices made by military families, and would act as a "moving memorial" for those who lost their lives in combat. The ongoing

wars in Iraq and Afghanistan place enormous strains on military service members and their families, and a license plate memorializing individuals who have died in those or other wars would be a small but meaningful way to honor their sacrifice for the country. At least 45 other states have similar license plates for gold star mothers or gold star families, according to the American Gold Star Mothers.

The proposed Gold Star Family license plate would be similar to existing plates for military service members, and therefore would not be likely to pose problems for law enforcement officers trying to identify Michigan plates.

Legislative Analyst: Julie Cassidy

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would have no fiscal impact on State or local government.

Fiscal Analyst: Joe Carrasco

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.