



**House  
Legislative  
Analysis  
Section**

Manufacturer's Bank Building, 12th Floor  
Lansing, Michigan 48909  
Phone: 517/373-6466

**MILITARY RESERVIST LICENSE PLATES**

**House Bill 4937 with committee amendments**  
**First Analysis (6-7-90)**

**Sponsor: Rep. Dick Allen**  
**Committee: Military and Veteran Affairs**

***THE APPARENT PROBLEM:***

Since 1982, Michigan has allowed U.S. veterans who are former prisoners of war to obtain specially inscribed license plates. In 1988 and 1989, the legislature made specially inscribed plates available to veterans of World War I, recipients of the purple heart, survivors of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, current and former members of the Michigan National Guard, and veterans of World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. Current and former members of the military reserve are one group, however, that does not have this privilege. Legislation has been proposed that would add military reservists to the list of military-related groups that could obtain special license plates.

***THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:***

The bill would amend the Michigan Vehicle Code to allow present or former members of the military reserve to get special license plates with a decal or the words "military reservist" in front of the registration numbers. The plate would carry a \$5 service charge in addition to the regular registration fee, and provisions would be made for handicappers to be issued handicapper stickers for such plates.

MCL 257.803m

***FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:***

According to the Department of State, so far the \$5 service charge on veterans' license plates made available under the 1988 and 1989 legislation is not covering the costs of the plates. Reportedly, some 300,000 veterans and National Guard members are eligible for the special plates, but as of last fall only 8,600 special plates had been sold. If this trend continued for the military reservist plates, the state would lose an indeterminate amount of money producing them. (6-6-90)

***ARGUMENTS:***

***For:***

The bill would give military reservists, who reportedly were accidentally overlooked in last year's package of bills for veterans and National Guard members, the same recognition that the state now gives other military groups.

***Against:***

The open-ended proliferation of "special" license plates, rather than singling groups out for special recognition, could have just the opposite effect. If any group can have "special" plates, then no group really is special anymore. It also is unclear, even though veterans and military groups should be recognized, why license plates are a particularly appropriate way to do this. Surely, especially in the case of veterans, there are more meaningful ways to recognize and honor the sacrifices made by these men and women,

such as designating an official state day of recognition (or even by returning Memorial Day observance to its original date).

***Response:*** Public Act 111 (enrolled House Bill 4680) of 1989 already allows nonprofit fraternal or public service organizations to get special license plates under certain circumstances, an indication, surely, that many people believe that the proliferation of special plates does not trivialize the plates. But in addition, surely military reservists are as worthy of recognition by means of having their own special license plates as are the other groups so recognized, regardless of whether or not license plates have any intrinsic suitability for giving recognition to such groups. Since the precedent has already been well established, it would be unfair to deny military reservists their own plates.

***POSITIONS:***

The Department of State has no position on the bill. (6-6-90)

Members of the following organizations testified in support of the bill (5-30-90):

The American Legion

AMVETS

Veterans of Foreign Wars (6th District)

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