



**House  
Legislative  
Analysis  
Section**

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**MICHIGAN MEMORIAL HIGHWAYS**

**House Bill 4878 as enrolled  
Public Act 142 of 2001  
Second Analysis (1-8-02)**

**Sponsor: Rep. Thomas George  
House Committee: Transportation  
Senate Committee: Transportation and  
Tourism**

***THE APPARENT PROBLEM:***

Since about 1925 the legislature has periodically enacted laws or passed resolutions to name all or parts of highways. Generally the named highways are signed so that travelers are aware the roadways commemorate historical events or recognize prominent people in the community. The Department of Transportation recently made an inventory of the named highways and published that inventory on a web site. See *BACKGROUND INFORMATION* below.

The number of named highways has proliferated to a degree that has sometimes caused confusion. For example, the House Fiscal Agency notes that since one of the earliest highway naming bills was enacted near the beginning of the last century to honor the poet Will A. Carleton [b. 1845, d. 1912; Michigan's poet laureate for four decades best known for his sentimental poems of rural life, the most famous being "Over the Road to the Poorhouse," and his collected works *Farm Ballads* (1873), *Farm Legends* (1875), and *City Ballads* (1885); namesake, too, for the town of Carleton in Monroe County], the practice continues to flourish at the beginning of this century: seven such bills were introduced in the 1997-98 session, 11 in the 1999-2000 legislative session, and already five in this the 91st session of the Michigan legislature. Concern about the proliferation of road names has caused some to speculate that some portions of roadway bear two different names. Concern also has been expressed about the cost of providing signs along the roadways.

In order to keep a timely inventory, avoid duplication, and reduce the cost of memorial signs, legislation has been proposed to create a single statute for the consolidation of state highway names.

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

House Bill 4878 would create a new act to be known as the Michigan Memorial Highway Act, in order to consolidate and codify in a single statute more than 60 highways and portions of highways that have been named in memory of individuals and groups having historical prominence in their communities. The bill would also require that the Transportation Department only provide for the erection of suitable signs at the approach of any of the highways, after sufficient private contributions had been received to pay the cost of erecting those markers. The bill would repeal 24 acts, 43 resolutions, and three administrative designations made by the highway commissioner that named all or portions of various highways, in order to consolidate most of those acts, resolutions and administrative designations into the new memorial highway act. Further, the bill would repeal one act and six resolutions that are either outdated or duplicative.

***BACKGROUND INFORMATION:***

All memorial highways are listed at [www.mdot.state.mi.us/misc/memhiways](http://www.mdot.state.mi.us/misc/memhiways).

The highway designations repealed under House Bill 4878 would include the following highways:

- PA 70 of 1952 - Arthur Vandenberg Memorial Highway on US-16 from Detroit to Muskegon;
- HCR 9 of 1933 - William Howard Taft Memorial Highway from Mackinac City to the Michigan-Ohio line (with no location specified);
- SCR 216 of 1975 - Michigan Bicentennial Freedom Way (1976 only) along I-75;
- HCR 401 of 1981 - I. L. "Curley" Lewis Highway located without specification in the Upper Peninsula;

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- HCR 67 of 1983 - Scenic route designation on US-23 from Standish to Mackinaw City;
- HCR 34 of 1991 - Martin Luther King Memorial Highway located on Skyline Drive in Battle Creek; and,
- HCR 25 of 1993 - Business 31 located on US-31 located in Berrien County.

***FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:***

The House Fiscal Agency notes that although the cost of sign fabrication and installation varies based on a number of factors, department sources estimate the cost to be from \$700 to \$1,000 per sign. To the extent that this bill would require private rather than state funds to be used for the erection of highway name signs, it could be considered to result in a decrease in state costs. (6-18-01)

The Senate Fiscal Agency notes that the bill would not have a fiscal impact on the state, as the costs of erecting highway markers would be borne by private contributions. Current practice requires highway markers to be paid for by private funds, regardless of whether a highway was named under a public act, resolution, or the authority of the state highway commissioner. (9-28-01)

***ARGUMENTS:***

***For:***

Historical events and prominent citizens deserve recognition in our communities. One way to commemorate events and people and to ensure ongoing public awareness is to place sign along a public roadway. This legislation allows this practice to continue, and would make more efficient the designation process in the Department of Transportation.

***For:***

The bill would repeal a combined total of 70 public acts, resolutions and commissioner designations, and re-enact most of them in a single memorial highway statute. It is clear from this legislation that the number of named highways has proliferated over the years, and the method of naming highways has included the enactment of legislation, the adoption of resolutions by the Senate or the House or both, and, in some past cases, a designation by the state highway commissioner. While most of the enacted legislation has been codified in one place in the statutes, the resolutions are not similarly published

together. This can lead to confusion and duplication. To avoid this result, and provide for an orderly inventory of named highways, the bill would consolidate them into one statute. At the same time, the bill would prevent the proliferation of signs that can result from duplicative names, and confuse motorists.

***For:***

Under the bill, the Department of Transportation could not put up signs for named highways until it had received enough private contributions to cover the cost. This would codify the department's current practice, as well as reflect similar language that has been included in recently enacted highway-naming legislation.

***Against:***

The proliferation of signs along the highway will increase with time. As it does so, the many signs will provide more distractions for drivers so that travel becomes unsafe, and the sign placements will mar the natural beauty of the land- and streetscape.

Analyst: J. Hunault

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■ 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.