



Senate Fiscal Agency
P. O. Box 30036
Lansing, Michigan 48909-7536



Telephone: (517) 373-5383
Fax: (517) 373-1986
TDD: (517) 373-0543

Senate Bill 749 (Substitute S-1 as reported)
Sponsor: Senator John Pappageorge
Committee: Transportation

(as passed by the Senate)

Date Completed: 7-13-10

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 the spouse, parent, sibling, or child of a member of the armed services who died during combat to apply to the Secretary of State (SOS) for a Gold Star Family special registration plate.

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 to the spouse, parent, sibling, or child of a member of the armed services who died during combat. The application would have to be accompanied by any proof that the SOS required.

MCL 257.803e

BACKGROUND

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	803i

The 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 would typically display 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: Curtis Walker

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.