



Senate Fiscal Agency
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BILL ANALYSIS



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Senate Bill 821 (Substitute S-2 as passed by the Senate)
Sponsor: Senator Phil Pavlov
Committee: Transportation

Date Completed: 9-28-18

RATIONALE

Currently, 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 or killed while serving in the United States Armed Forces, Purple Heart recipients, and former prisoners of war, among others (see **BACKGROUND** for a complete list of the military-related special plates offered by the Secretary of State). The Code allows a member of a "Gold Star Family" to apply for a special Gold Star Family registration plate (which is available to a person who has had an immediate family member die while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces if the immediate family member meets the eligibility criteria prescribed under Federal law for a Gold Star Lapel Button). However, the State does not offer a plate for an individual who has an immediate family member currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. Many have observed that family members of an enlistee also feel the effects of the enlistment. In an effort to recognize those who have family members serving in the military, it has been suggested that such a plate be created.

CONTENT

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

The plate would have to be inscribed with special identification numbers preceded by the Blue Star Families insignia and would have to have the words "Blue Star Family" inscribed beneath the registration number.

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

Application for a "Gold Star Family" special registration plate must be on a form prescribed by the Secretary of State and be accompanied by any proof of the applicant having been a Gold Star Family member that the Secretary of State may require. The applicant must pay the \$5 service fee and the applicable registration tax. The bill would extend these provisions to a Blue Star Family special registration plate.

"Blue Star Family member" would mean a person who is currently serving, or a person who has an immediate family member serving, in the United States Armed Forces or in forces incorporated as part of the United States Armed Forces. "Immediate family member" would mean a parent, stepparent, adoptive parent, foster parent standing in loco parentis, child, stepchild, adopted child, sibling, half-sibling, spouse, or grandparent.

The bill would take effect on August 1, 2019.

MCL 257.803e

BACKGROUND

Gold Star Lapel Button Eligibility Criteria

Public Act 46 of 2011 created the Gold Star Family special plate. The plate's issuance depends on an immediate family member's meeting any of the eligibility criteria specified in 10 USC 1126(a) (1) to (3) for a Gold Star Lapel Button. Under those provisions, the Gold Star Lapel Button must be designed, as approved by the Secretary of Defense, to identify widows, parents, and next of kin of the following members of the U.S. Armed Forces:

- Those who lost their lives during World War I, World War II, or during any subsequent period of armed hostilities in which the United States was engaged in 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, while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force, or while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict in which the United States 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 United States or a foreign nation friendly to the United States, or military operations while serving outside the United States as part of a peacekeeping force.

The Gold Star Lapel Button is furnished to the widow, each parent, and next of kin of a service member who dies under any of the above circumstances.

Service Flag and Service Lapel Button

United States law specifies that a service flag approved by the Secretary of Defense may be displayed in a window of the place of residence of individuals who are members of the immediate family of an individual serving in the U.S. Armed Forces during any period of war or hostilities in which the Armed Forces are engaged. For the Immediate Family Member Service Flag, the design is a blue star (or stars) on a white field with a red border. The number of blue stars corresponds to the number of service members from the immediate family symbolized on the flag. If the service member symbolized is killed or dies from causes other than dishonorable, the star representing that individual will be gold.

A service lapel button approved by the Secretary also may be worn by members of the immediate family of an individual serving in the Armed Forces during that period. As is the case with the service flag, the blue star of the Service Lapel Pin signifies that a member of the wearer's immediate family is currently serving during a period of war or hostilities.

Any person may apply to the Secretary for a license to manufacture and sell the approved service flag or lapel button, or both. Any person that manufactures a service flag or lapel button without having first obtained a license, or otherwise violates these provisions, is liable for a civil penalty of not more than \$1,000.

Current 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
Afghanistan Campaign Medal Veteran	803o
Air Force Veteran	803i
Army Veteran	803i
Coast Guard Veteran	803i
Combat Wounded Veteran (Purple Heart)	803e
Cuban Missile Crisis	803o
Disabled Veteran	803f
Dominican Republic Veteran	803o
Ex-Prisoner of War	803e
Gold Star Family	803e
Grenada Conflict Veteran	803n
Iraq Conflict Veteran	803o
Iraq Campaign Medal 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
Vietnam Service Medal Veteran	803k
World War II Veteran	803l

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

Serving in the U.S. Armed forces can place a great burden on the entire family of the service member if he or she is deployed for an extended period of time. Currently, the only plate that is available to individuals who have an immediate family member serving in the U.S. Armed Forces is a Gold Star Family plate, which indicates that the member has been killed while serving in the military. In addition to recognizing and honoring those who currently serve in the U.S. Armed Forces, the Blue Star Family plate would highlight those who have an immediate family member serving in the military and allow them to display their pride and solidarity with other Blue Star families.

Legislative Analyst: Drew Krogulecki

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would have a negligible fiscal impact on the Department of State due to programming costs associated with the provisions of the bill; however, these costs should be minimal and absorbable within current annual appropriations.

Blue Star Family members who would qualify under the bill for the Blue Star Family designation would still be required to pay the required annual registration fee along with the required \$5 service fee to cover the cost of the Blue Star Family designation. However, as mentioned above, the Department would have some computer programming costs to allow a designation to be granted to a larger pool of veteran families.

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.