

# Legislative Analysis



## BEN LAUREN AND DON RILING MEMORIAL HIGHWAY

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<http://www.house.mi.gov/hfa>

**Senate Bill 921 as referred to second House committee**

**Sponsor: Sen. Edward McBroom**

**1st House Committee: Transportation**

**2nd House Committee: Ways and Means**

**Senate Committee: Transportation and Infrastructure**

**Complete to 12-12-20**

Analysis available at  
<http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

### SUMMARY:

Senate Bill 921 would amend the Michigan Memorial Highway Act to designate all of the portion of highway M-35 that is in Forsyth Township as the “Ben Lauren and Don Riling Memorial Highway.”

Proposed MCL 250.1008c

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

According to committee testimony, *The Mining Journal*, and the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation, Firefighter **Donald L. Riling** was born November 17, 1946 in Altoona, Pennsylvania, the son of Fred and Agnes Riling. He served in the U.S. Air Force and was honorably discharged in 1970. He moved to Hollywood Hills, Florida where he was a member of the Hollywood Hills Volunteer Fire Department. In 1975, he became a resident of Gwinn, Michigan, where he was employed at K.I. Sawyer AFB as a firefighter. He was also a member of the Gwinn Volunteer Fire Department and the Marquette County Firefighters Association and was voted Firefighter of the Year for Forsyth Township in 1988.

On March 19, 1988, while fighting a house fire in Forsyth Township, Donald L. Riling was injured and died in the line of duty.

**Benjamin “Ben” Lauren**, born June 14, 1996, was the son of Ronald and Carla Lauren and a resident of Gwinn. He was a 2014 graduate of Gwinn High School and a 2018 graduate of Northern Michigan University.

Ben grew up spending his free time playing with his siblings, friends, and cousins, hunting deer, and doing chores far beyond his age expectations. He loved the Detroit Tigers, lived and breathed NASCAR, and was a fan of Dale Earnhardt. He would often wear his #8 hat, and later the same number on his fire helmet. Ben was fascinated with the fire department. He enjoyed big trucks and flashing lights. That fascination became determination, and he joined the fire department as a cadet at age 14. He certified as a firefighter at age 18. In 2018, he received the Forsyth Township Fireman of the Year award and worked tirelessly to create and build camaraderie within the fire department. He was third-generation firefighter who served alongside his sister and father. When the fire pager toned, he hastily raced to the hall saying, “I was born for this!”

On Friday evening, March 13, 2020, Forsyth Township Fire Department Captain Ben Lauren was battling a duplex blaze on a former U.S. Air Force base. According to news reports, while working the interior of the structure, part of the floor collapsed, and Captain Lauren became trapped between the first and basement floors. He died of his injuries. He was 23 years old.

Dedicating a portion of M-35 in Forsyth Township would be an appropriate way to honor Firefighters Ben Lauren and Don Riling for their dedication, service, and sacrifice to their community and our state.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

Section 2 of the Michigan Memorial Highway Act indicates that the state transportation department shall provide for the erection of suitable markers indicating the name of the highway only “when sufficient private contributions are received to completely cover the cost of erecting and maintaining those markers.” As a result, the bill has no state or local fiscal impact.

**POSITIONS:**

The Michigan Department of Transportation indicated a neutral position on the bill. (12-3-20)

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