



**House
Legislative
Analysis
Section**

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SPECIALTY PLATE FOR "EX-POWS"

**House Bill 4651 (Substitute H-3)
First Analysis (4-9-02)**

**Sponsor: Rep. Gary Woronchak
Committee: Veterans Affairs**

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

As a means for the state to recognize and express its appreciation of the services rendered and the hardship endured by American prisoners of war (POWs), Public Act 152 of 1982 amended the Michigan Vehicle Code to allow ex-POWs to obtain a special license plate denoting that that person had been a POW. Under current law, an ex-POW applying for a special registration plate must provide the secretary of state with proof that he or she had been a prisoner of war, in addition to paying a \$5 service fee.

Only the ex-POW may apply for the special license plate. Often, when an ex-POW dies, the title of the vehicle changes to the name of his or her surviving spouse. When this happens, however, the spouse cannot retain the special ex-POW license plate. According to committee testimony, there are at least 21 other states that issue an ex-POW license plate and allow the surviving spouse to retain that plate at no cost. Legislation has been introduced that would allow the spouse of an ex-POW to obtain the special license plate, and remove the fee for the issuance of certain veterans license plates.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

House Bill 4651 would amend the Michigan Vehicle Code to allow the surviving spouse or current spouse of a prisoner of war to obtain a special "ex-prisoner of war" license plate. Under current law, only an ex-prisoner of war, who shows proper documentation, may obtain the special license plate. In addition, the bill would remove the \$5 application fee and renewal fee for the following special license plates: "ex-prisoner of war", "World War I veteran", "Pearl Harbor survivor", and "combat wounded veteran" (purple heart recipient).

MCL 257.803e

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The Secretary of State's Office makes several veterans license plates available to a veteran or his or

her spouse. These specialty plates include veterans of World War II, the Korean War, the Laos Conflict, the Vietnam War, the Grenada Conflict, the Lebanon Conflict, the Somalia Conflict, the Panama Conflict, and the Persian Gulf War. There are several other special military veteran plates that are not available to a spouse. These license plates include a World War I veteran, combat wounded veteran, Pearl Harbor Survivor, past or present member of the National Guard Member or military reserve, and veterans of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard.

According to the Department of State, as of August 2001, the total number of special registration license plates issued were as follows: ex-POWs - 935; combat wounded veteran - 3,048; World War I - zero; and Pearl Harbor survivor - 168.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

The Department of State reports that in the past 12 months, 563 special registration plates had been applied for. This would equate to \$2,815 in service fees collected (\$5 x 563). There is no information from which to predict the number of prisoner of war spouses that would make application for the "EX-POW" special registration plates.

The fiscal impact of the bill is an indeterminate decrease of revenue. Local units of government would see no fiscal impact. (House Fiscal Agency analysis 3-22-02)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

Faced with the constant prospect of death, torture, and the unspeakable conditions of the POW camps, former POWs have overcome a great deal of adversity in order to return home to their family, friends, and loved ones. While the physical scars have healed with time, many former POWs have dealt with a lifetime of psychological stress as well as

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recurring nightmares and flashbacks of the horrific events that they had endured. These wartime experiences of former POWs have greatly impacted not only their lives, but also the lives of their spouse and other family and friends. Spouses of ex-POWs have been an integral part of the healing process. As such, they have earned, and should be afforded, the ability to obtain an ex-POW license plate to honor the courage and strength of their spouse.

Furthermore, removing the service fee for certain veterans plates serves as a small honor to those who bravely served the country in its greatest time of need.

Response:

Rather than only allowing the spouse of an ex-POW to obtain a specialty plate, among others already allowed to do so under current law, that privilege should be expanded to include the other special military plates that are only limited to veterans (such as an Army or Navy veteran) under current law. Furthermore, the bill waives the \$5 fee for certain license plates. The fee should be waived for other veterans license plates also.

Against:

The bill sets a bad precedent by removing the \$5 service for issuing special license plates for World War I veterans, Pearl Harbor survivors, combat wounded veterans, and ex-POWs. Though the fiscal impact of this bill does not appear to be great, the cumulative effect of similar measures (removing the fees for all special veterans plates, as some have suggested) would result in substantial loss of revenue.

POSITIONS:

The Wolverine Chapter #1 of the American Ex-Prisoners of War, Inc. supports the bill. (3-23-02)

The Department of Michigan Veterans of Foreign Wars supports the bill. (3-23-02)

The American Legion Department of Michigan supports the bill. (3-23-02)

The Department of State supports the concept of allowing a spouse to obtain the special "ex-POW" license plate, but is opposed to the removal of the fees for obtaining World War I veteran, Pearl Harbor survivor, combat wounded veteran, and ex-POW license plates. (3-23-02)

Analyst: M. Wolf

■ 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.