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RENAME SOJOURNER TRUTH HWY.

House Bill 4771 as introduced
First Analysis (6-9-93)

Sponsor: Rep. Bill Martin
Committee: Transportation

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

In 1976, during the nation's bicentennial celebrations, a portion of state highway M-66 in Calhoun County was designated as the "Sojourner Truth Memorial Highway," in honor of the famous abolitionist who is buried nearby in Battle Creek. However, a portion of the Sojourner Truth Memorial Highway, between Interstate I-94 and Hamblin, has become more commonly known as "The Penetrator." As part of a campaign to encourage tourists to visit Battle Creek, a local development company -- the Cereal City Development Corporation (CCDC) -- has suggested that the "Penetrator" section of the Sojourner Truth Memorial Highway be renamed the "Sojourner Truth Downtown Parkway." (The CCDC has been designated by Battle Creek as its downtown developer, and uses downtown development funds to promote the downtown area). The CCDC plans to erect signs directing tourists to the downtown area, and maintains that signs which read "Take the Sojourner Truth Downtown Parkway to Wonderful Downtown Battle Creek," would have greater promotional appeal than "Take the Penetrator to Wonderful Downtown Battle Creek."

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

Public Act 93 of 1976 designated a portion of state highway M-66 in Calhoun County as the "Sojourner Truth Memorial Highway." The bill would amend the act to specify that the portion of M-66 between Interstate 94 and Hamblin would be designated as the "Sojourner Truth Downtown Parkway."

MCL 250.371

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

The Michigan Department of Transportation estimates that implementing the bill would cost several thousand dollars for the placement of two markers to indicate a portion of highway M-66's new name. On the other hand, the City of Battle

Creek has estimated that it could produce the markers at a cost of approximately \$500, and the city has indicated its willingness to assume this cost. (6-3-93)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

In an attempt to honor the memory of a famous abolitionist who is buried in Battle Creek, a portion of state highway M-66 in Calhoun County was designated as the "Sojourner Truth Memorial Highway" in 1976. The effort was not entirely successful: a portion of the highway, which leads to Battle Creek's downtown business district, has become better known to local residents as the "Penetrator." The bill would rename a portion of this highway -- on M-66, between Interstate I-94 and Hamblin -- as the Sojourner Truth Downtown Parkway. This would serve to emphasize in a highly visible way the link between Sojourner Truth and the City of Battle Creek, which was once the center of abolitionist sentiment in the state. Sojourner Truth was a black woman who lived as a slave in New York state until 1828, when she was freed by that state's decision to emancipate its slaves. She moved to Battle Creek in the late 1840's, and conducted an extensive lecture tour promoting abolitionism. In 1850, she joined the feminist movement and became involved in the struggle to secure for women the right to vote. During the Civil War, she was an advisor to President Abraham Lincoln on the problems of the newly-freed blacks in America. After the war, she return to Michigan and continued to work in the areas of civil rights and feminism. When she died, in the late 1880's, she was over 90 years of age. Her history is therefore important, not only in the annals of civil rights and feminism, but in the history of Michigan as well.

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POSITIONS:

The City of Battle Creek supports the bill. (6-3-93)

The Department of Civil Rights supports the bill.
(6-3-93)

The Cereal City Development Corporation (CCDC)
in Battle Creek supports the bill. (6-3-93)

The Michigan Department of Transportation has no
position on the bill. (6-3-93)