



Romney Building, 10th Floor
Lansing, Michigan 48909
Phone: 517/373-6466

MICHIGAN FREEDOM TRAIL COMMISSION ACT

House Bill 5637

Sponsor: Rep. Samuel Buzz Thomas

Committee: House Oversight and Ethics

Complete to 4-1-98

A SUMMARY OF HOUSE BILL 5637 AS INTRODUCED 3-5-98

The bill would create the Michigan Freedom Trail Commission Act, creating a "Michigan Freedom Trail Commission" in the Department of State to promote and preserve the history of the freedom trail and underground railroad in the state.

Commission members, operation. The commission would exercise its prescribed duties and functions independently of the secretary of state, though its budgeting, procurement, and related functions and its administrative staffing would be performed under the direction and supervision of the secretary of state. Twelve commission members would be appointed by the governor within 90 days of the bill's effective date. Appointed members would consist of three members from the academic community who were knowledgeable in African-American history, three members who were active in civil rights issues, three members who were knowledgeable in historic preservation, and three members who represented a local government unit in which the underground railroad had a significant presence. In addition to the twelve appointed members, the commission also would have six *ex officio* members: the directors (or their designees) of the Departments of Natural Resources and of Consumer and Industry Services, the director of the travel bureau (or his or her designee), the state librarian (or his or her designee), and the secretary of state (or his or her designee). Appointed members would serve for four-year terms (or until a successor was appointed, whichever were later), except for the members initially appointed (who would be appointed to staggered one-, two-, and three-year terms). The governor would fill vacancies among appointed commission members in the same way as the original appointments, and could remove commission members for any good cause, including incompetency, dereliction of duty, malfeasance, misfeasance, or nonfeasance in office. Members would serve without compensation, though they could be reimbursed for their actual and necessary expenses incurred in performance of their official duties.

At their first meeting, commission members would elect a commission chair and other officers considered necessary or appropriate. After the first meeting, the commission would meet at least quarterly, or more frequently at the call of the chair or at the request of six or more of the appointed members. A majority of the appointed members would constitute a quorum, and a majority of appointed members present and serving would be required for official commission action. The commission would be required to conduct its business in compliance with the Open Meetings Act, and commission writings ("writings prepared, owned, used, in the possession of, or retained by the commission in the performance of an official function") would be subject to the Freedom of Information Act.

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Commission duties. The commission would be required to do all of the following:

** Review, plan, and implement a master plan to promote and preserve the history of the freedom trail and underground railroad in Michigan;

** Work with state and federal authorities to sponsor commemorations, linkages, seminars, and public forums on the freedom trail and underground railroad;

** Help and promote applications for inclusion in the national and state register of historic places for historic places related to the freedom trail and the underground railroad in Michigan;

** Help and develop partnerships to seek public and private funds to carry out activities to protect, preserve, and promote the legacy of the freedom trail and underground railroad in Michigan; and

** Report annually to the governor and both houses of the legislature on commission activities each calendar year.

Analyst: S. Ekstrom

■ 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.