



House Office Building, 9 South
Lansing, Michigan 48909
Phone: 517/373-6466

HONORARY DIPLOMATIC CONSUL SPECIALTY LICENSE PLATES

House Bill 4458 (Substitute H-2) First Analysis (10-21-99)

Sponsor: Rep. John Pappageorge
Committee: Transportation

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

It is customary that some foreign countries confer upon American citizens the honorary title of special consul. The special consul then serves as a host when diplomats and envoys from that foreign land visit the United States to conduct the business of their corporations and government. Generally, the special consul accompanies the diplomats and envoys as they travel about our cities and state, and offers them the kind of practical assistance that helps to make their visits productive while they are in a land whose laws and customs may differ markedly from their own.

Although the title special consul is largely honorary and confers no special privileges or immunity from traffic and vehicle safety laws, some have argued that special consuls should be able to have their status recognized when they purchase a specialty license plate.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

House Bill 4458 would add a new section to the Michigan Vehicle Code to allow people who are designated as honorary consuls by the diplomatic corps of a nation recognized by the U.S. government, and who are assigned or stationed in Michigan, to apply for special registration plates for their passenger vehicles. The plate would be inscribed with the words "honorary consul."

The bill would require that application for the special plate be made on a form specified by the secretary of state. The application would be accompanied by acceptable proof that the applicant had been designated as an honorary consul, and by payment of a \$30 consulate identification fee for one special plate (or a \$35 fee for two plates). The bill would require that the consul identification fees be deposited in the state treasury and credited to the Michigan Transportation

Fund, and that the revenue be used to defray the expenses of the secretary of state in issuing the plates.

Further, the bill would require that upon proper application and payment, the secretary of state issue one or more special registration plates for each applicant for use on a passenger vehicle, and that a person issued the plate or plates would pay the applicable tax under section 801 of the vehicle code. (Section 801 sets registration fees based on vehicle weight, and specifies taxes based on vehicle list price.)

The bill specifies that use of a special registration plate on a vehicle other than the vehicle for which the plate is issued, or by a person who did not qualify, would be a misdemeanor, and that the plate would expire on the birthday of the vehicle owner. Under the bill, issuance of a special registration plate would not confer diplomatic status or diplomatic immunity upon the applicant.

The bill would take effect October 1, 2000.

MCL 257.803q

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

According to the House Fiscal Agency, the Department of State would incur additional administrative costs associated with the manufacture and sale of the new registration plate. It is assumed these additional costs would be covered by the appropriate consulate identification fee and/or the \$5 service fee (subject to appropriation). Any additional revenue, above the administrative costs, collected through the new consulate identification fees and/or the \$5 service fee would be deposited in the Michigan Transportation Fund. There are no data to indicate how many individuals would apply for such registration plates. (10-12-99)

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ARGUMENTS:

For:

There are about 60 special consuls in Michigan, and this bill would acknowledge their status by allowing them to declare their titles on their license plates. Special consuls are those who serve as special hosts when diplomats and envoys from foreign lands visit the United States to conduct the business of their corporations and governments. Usually special consuls are American citizens whose countries of birth have conferred upon them the honorary title of special consul. Special consuls then serve their former countrymen as hosts when they travel here as envoys to the United States, helping them to make their way about our cities and the state, and offering them the kind of practical assistance that serves to make their visits productive. The bill would not confer any special privileges (such as parking privileges, or immunity from traffic and vehicle safety laws) upon those whose specialty license plates denote their special consul status.

POSITIONS:

The Office of the Secretary of State supports the bill.
(10-19-99)

Analyst: J. Hunault

■ 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.