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## HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA TO WORLD WAR II VETERANS

House Bill 4733 as introduced  
First Analysis (10-9-01)

Sponsor: Rep. Stephen Ehardt  
Committee: Education

### ***THE APPARENT PROBLEM:***

After the attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, many young men enlisted in the armed services to soldier on behalf of their country. Some of the young men were high school students—aged 17 or 18—who left their high school studies before graduation in order to enlist. Upon return to their communities, and considerably matured by the experience and travel that comes of service in a world-wide war fought in both Europe and Asia, the soldiers did not return to school to earn a high school diploma. Many regret they did not do so. In recognition of that fact, a nationwide program called Operation Recognition has been underway since 1999 to identify the veterans and award them their high school diplomas.

Operation Recognition was begun by the Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services as a "small overdue gesture of our society's gratitude for the sacrifice these individuals made in the name of freedom." The first recognition ceremony to award diplomas—a graduation conducted on May 20, 1999 at Gardner High School in Boston, Massachusetts—presented high school diplomas to 39 veterans of World War II, and shortly thereafter 70 more communities in that state adopted the honorary diploma recognition program.

Since 1999, Operation Recognition has spread beyond Massachusetts to become national in its scope. According to a press release by the Army News Service dated June 11, 2001, twenty-two states, including Michigan, had either enacted or are working to enact administrative rules or legislation that would award high school diplomas to World War II veterans. (See *BACKGROUND INFORMATION* below.) To be eligible to receive the special diploma, veterans must have served in World War II, demonstrate an honorable discharge, and identify the high school they left during the massive call-up that followed the attack on Pearl Harbor.

At the recommendation of the Sanilac County Veterans Affairs Board (and with the urging of a local resident who received an Operation Recognition diploma from his high school in New York state), legislation has been introduced in Michigan that would initiate Operation Recognition so that, in the words of the New York veteran now living in Michigan who spearheaded the effort, "Michigan's boys could also enjoy this honor."

### ***THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:***

House Bill 4733 would create a new act to allow school district boards to award high school diplomas to World War II veterans, and it would make the Department of Veterans and Military Affairs responsible for the program.

Under the bill, the board of a school district could award a high school diploma to a military veteran if he or she was at least 65 years old when making application for the diploma, and the board was satisfied that all of the following were true: a) before graduating high school, the veteran enlisted in, or was drafted into, the armed forces of the United States during World War II, between December 7, 1941 and September 2, 1945; b) at the time he or she was drafted or enlisted, the veteran was enrolled in a high school in the school district; c) the veteran had not graduated from high school; and d) the veteran had served under honorable conditions during World War II.

The bill would require that an application form be prescribed by the Veterans Affairs Directorate of the Department of Veterans and Military Affairs, and that the department notify the board of each school district of the bill and take steps to encourage each district to meet the objective of the bill. Further, it specifies that the application for the diploma could be completed by the veteran, or by the veteran's spouse, brother, sister, children, or grandchildren.

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

According to the Army News Service, as of June 11, 2001 the following states were participating in Operation Recognition: Alaska, Alabama, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts (where the program originated), Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, and West Virginia. A search of the Internet indicates that since June 2001, the states of Kansas and North Carolina also are participating, bringing the total to 24 states. In one state, California, one county superintendent of schools awards the honorary diploma to World War II veterans, Korean War veterans, and also to the thousands of Japanese American citizens who were forced to leave their homes and be interned in relocation camps for the duration of the war.

The government relations committee of the Michigan Association of School Boards will recommend support of the bill to the organization's board of directors. (10-5-01)

**FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:**

The House Fiscal Agency notes that the bill has fiscal no implications. (10-4-01)

**ARGUMENTS:****For:**

During the 1940s thousands of young men and women left high school and the comforts of home to serve in the United States armed forces during the massive call-up of soldiers following the attack on Pearl Harbor. Their sacrifice ensured our freedom and shaped the course of history. After the war, many of the veterans were unable to complete their high school studies, yet led productive lives and helped build vital families and communities throughout their lifetimes. In recognition of their contribution, this legislation to implement Operation Recognition for Michigan's World War II veterans is appropriate for it reminds us that sacrifice should be honored, and whenever possible, it also should be rewarded.

**POSITIONS:**

The Sanilac County Veterans Affairs Board supports the bill. (10-5-01)

The American Legion supports the bill. (10-4-01)

The Department of Education supports the bill. (10-4-01)

Analyst: J. Hunault

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■ 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.