House
Legislative
Analysis
Section

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MICHIGAN MEMORIAL HIGHWAYS

House Bill 4878 as introduced
First Analysis (6-28-01)

Sponsor: Rep. Thomas George
Committee: Transportation

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Since about 1925 the legislature has periodically enacted laws or passed resolutions to name all or parts of highways. Generally the named highways are signed so that travelers are aware the roadways commemorate historical events or recognize prominent people in the community. The Department of Transportation recently made an inventory of the named highways and published that inventory on a web site. See *BACKGROUND INFORMATION* below.

The number of named highways has proliferated to a degree that has sometimes caused confusion. For example, the House Fiscal Agency notes that since one of the earliest highway naming bills was enacted near the beginning of the last century to honor the poet Will A. Carleton [b. 1845, d. 1912; Michigan's poet laureate for four decades best known for his sentimental poems of rural life, the most famous being "Over the Road to the Poorhouse," and his collected works *Farm Ballads* (1873), *Farm Legends* (1875), and *City Ballads* (1885); namesake, too, for the town of Carleton in Monroe County], the practice continues to flourish at the beginning of this century: seven such bills were introduced in the 1997-98 session, 11 in the 1999-2000 legislative session, and already five in this the 91st session of the Michigan legislature. Concern about the proliferation of road names has caused some to speculate that some portions of roadway bear two different names. Concern also has been expressed about the cost of providing signs along the roadways.

In order to keep a timely inventory, avoid duplication, and reduce the cost of memorial signs, legislation has been proposed to create a single statute for the consolidation of state highway names.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

House Bill 4878 would create a new act to be known as the Michigan Memorial Highway Act, in order to consolidate and codify in a single statute more than 50 highways and portions of highways that have been named in memory of individuals and groups having historical prominence in their communities. The bill would also require that the Transportation Department only provide for the erection of suitable signs at the approach of any of the highways, after sufficient private contributions had been received to pay the cost of erecting those markers. Finally, the bill would repeal 22 acts and 43 resolutions that previously named all or portions of highways.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

All memorial highways are listed at www.mdot.state.mi.us/misc/memhiways.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

The House Fiscal Agency notes that although the cost of sign fabrication and installation varies based on a number of factors, department sources estimate the cost to be from $700 to $1,000 per sign. To the extent that this bill would require private rather than state funds to be used for the erection of highway name signs, it could be considered to result in a decrease in state costs. (6-18-01)

ARGUMENTS:

For:
Historical events and prominent citizens deserve recognition in our communities. One way to commemorate events and people and to ensure ongoing public awareness is to place sign along a public roadway. This legislation allows this practice to continue, and would make more efficient the designation process in the Department of Transportation.

Against:
The proliferation of signs along the highway will increase with time. As it does so, the many signs will provide more distractions for drivers so that travel becomes unsafe, and the sign placements will mar the natural beauty of the land- and streetscape.

POSITIONS:

The Department of Transportation supports the bill. (6-28-01)

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.