

## **SPECIALTY LICENSE PLATE FOR SPOUSE OF EX-POW**

**House Bill 4330 with House committee  
amendments  
First Analysis (5-20-03)**

**Sponsor: Rep. Gary Woronchak  
Committee: Transportation**

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

The American Ex-Prisoners of War Organization, a group that formed in 1942, has more than 30,000 members and 300 chapters nationwide. The services of this advocacy organization are described in detail at <http://www.axpow.com>. According to the organization, of the 125,207 prisoners of war who have survived their capture and internment since World War I and returned to the United States (including all captured survivors from World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, and Somalia) there were 49,707 former prisoners yet alive as of January 2000. (See *BACKGROUND INFORMATION* below.) The number of former prisoners of war who are Michigan citizens is unknown.

Since 1982, former prisoners of war, or POWs, who live in Michigan have been able to apply to the Office of the Secretary of State for a specialty license plate to put on the vehicles they drive. The specialty license plate allows the soldiers' fellow citizens to recognize their extraordinary record of bravery during their military service, and it also enables the state government to express its appreciation for the hardship endured by its citizens who were prisoners of war.

Under the current law—Public Act 152 of 1982—an ex-POW who applies for a special registration plate must provide the secretary of state with proof that he or she had been a prisoner of war, and in addition, pay a \$5 service fee. The law specifies that only the ex-POW may apply for the special license plate.

When a former prisoner of war dies, it is customary that the title of the vehicle he or she drives changes to the name of the surviving spouse. When this happens, however, the spouse cannot retain the special ex-POW license plate since the law prohibits anyone other than the former prisoner of war from making application for the specialty plate.

According to committee testimony, there are 21 other states that issue an ex-POW license plate, and also allow the surviving spouse to retain that plate, sometimes at no cost. This courtesy is extended to the surviving spouses of former prisoners of war in the states of Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin.

Legislation has been introduced here in Michigan that would allow the spouse of an ex-POW to make application for the special license plate.

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

House Bill 4330 would amend the Michigan Vehicle Code to allow a person whose spouse had been a prisoner of war to obtain a special "ex-POW" license plate. Currently, only an ex-prisoner of war, who shows proper documentation, may obtain the special license plate. The plate is available upon application to the secretary of state with payment of a \$5 service fee (or a \$5 renewal service fee). The bill specifies that one person in any household would be entitled to the special registration plate.

MCL 257.803e

### ***BACKGROUND INFORMATION:***

The following chart shows the number of American ex-prisoners of war as of January 1, 2002.

Ex-Prisoners of War

	<b>Total</b>	<b>WW I</b>	<b>WW II</b>	<b>Korea</b>	<b>Vietnam</b>	<b>Gulf War</b>	<b>Somalia</b>
Captured and Interned	<b>142,232</b>	4,120	130,201	7,140	744	23	1
Returned to US Military Control	<b>125,207</b>	3,973	116,129	4,418	660	23	1
Refused Repatriation	<b>21</b>	0	0	21	0	0	0
Died While POW	<b>17,004</b>	147	14,072	2,701	84	0	0
Alive as of January 2000	<b>49,707</b>	1	46,418	2,659	602	23	1

Source: American Former Prisoners of War Organization  
<http://www.axpow.com>

***FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:***

There is no fiscal information at present.

The American Ex-Prisoners of War Organization supports the bill. (5-15-03)

The Military Order of Purple Heart supports the bill. (5-15-03)

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

Faced with the constant prospect of death, torture, and the unspeakable conditions in the camps where they were captives, former prisoners of war live with vivid and deeply troubling memories. Although they return home to safety and loved ones, their sadness and grief always linger. Consequently, they must overcome continual adversity, in order to establish stable relationships with their families, friends, and loved ones. While their physical scars heal with time, many former prisoners of war contend with a lifetime of psychological stress, including recurring nightmares and flashbacks of the life-threatening events during the ordeal they endured. Their wartime experience profoundly alter their lives, and pose great challenges to their spouses, as the ex-POW couples struggle to build strong families that enhance kinship, as well as establish networks of support that enable friendship.

Ex-POW spouses remind us that “freedom is never free,” and that often we must fight to preserve it. This legislation allows the citizens of the state to honor the courage of former freedom fighters who survived prisoner of war camps, and also to laud the strength of their marriage partners and families who helped them know compassion and caring once again, when they returned home.

***POSITIONS:***

The Office of the Secretary of State supports the bill. (5-15-03)

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.