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BILL ANALYSIS

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Senate Bill 1243 (as enrolled)
Sponsor: Senator Cameron S. Brown
Committee: Senior Citizens and Veterans Affairs

Date Completed: 9-22-04

RATIONALE

To commemorate the heritage of the Purple Heart, which is awarded to members of the armed forces who are wounded or killed in action as a result of enemy activity, the Military Order of the Purple Heart is attempting to establish a nationwide "Purple Heart Trail". The route of the trail is intended to include interstate highways, U.S. highways, state highways, and/or local roads in parts of all 50 states and Puerto Rico. Some states already have designated their portion of the trail. In Virginia, where the Purple Heart Trail was initially established, monuments dedicated to the Trail have been erected in Mount Vernon, the site of George Washington's estate, and in Norfolk, at the MacArthur Museum. The Military Order of the Purple Heart has recommended that at least a portion of I-69 in Michigan be designated as the Purple Heart Trail. (Please see **BACKGROUND** for more information on the Purple Heart.)

CONTENT

The bill would amend the Michigan Memorial Highway Act to designate the portion of I-69 in Branch County as the "Purple Heart Trail".

MCL 250.1073

BACKGROUND

General George Washington created the Order of the Purple Heart for Military Merit, now commonly called the Purple Heart, during the Revolutionary War. General Washington sought to recognize officers for outstanding valor by rewarding them with additional pay or an advance in rank. When he was ordered to stop because the military could not afford to pay the soldiers, much

less the officers, he created the Badge of Military Merit for soldiers who displayed not only "unusual gallantry...but also...extraordinary fidelity and essential service". The medal, he specified, was to be in the form of a heart made from purple cloth or silk, and was to be worn on the left breast. There were three known recipients of the medal during the Revolutionary War.

The Badge of Military Merit lay dormant until 1931, when General Douglas MacArthur revived it for the bicentennial of George Washington's birth. The reissued medal is a gold-plated brass heart, with a bust of Washington in the center and, at the top, the Washington family coat of arms, which contains three red stars and two red horizontal stripes. (This coat of arms is believed to be one inspiration for the American flag.)

In 1932, the War Department announced the award and the revised eligibility criteria for receiving a Purple Heart: During battle with an enemy, recipients must have sustained a wound that necessitated medical treatment. (Therefore, not every wound incurred because of the conditions of war, such as trenchfoot or frostbite, would make a soldier eligible for a Purple Heart.) At the time, the award was limited to the Army. In 1942, President Roosevelt extended the award to the Navy, the Marine Corps, and the Coast Guard beginning December 6, 1941. Later, President Truman retroactively extended the award to cover World War I soldiers. In 1962, President Kennedy extended eligibility to "any civilian national of the United States who, while serving under competent authority in any capacity with an armed force...has been, or may

hereafter be, wounded". President Reagan amended President Kennedy's order in 1984 to include those wounded or killed as a result of an "international terrorist attack". In 1997, under President Clinton, the award again was limited to members of the armed forces.

Shortly after the award was reinstituted in 1931, a group of combat wounded veterans in Ansonia, Connecticut, formed the first chapter of a civilian organization for Purple Heart recipients. The organization grew rapidly during and after World War II, and is now known as the Military Order of the Purple Heart.

ARGUMENTS

(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)

Supporting Argument

The Purple Heart is the oldest military decoration in the world in present use, and the first award made available to a common soldier. Recipients of the award need not be recommended for it; rather, a soldier is entitled to a Purple Heart upon meeting specific criteria. In these times, it seems fitting to honor Purple Heart veterans by designating the Branch County portion of I-69 as the Purple Heart Trail, because they have given their lives or sustained an injury fighting for democracy.

Public Act 12 of 2002 amended the Michigan Memorial Highway Act to designate a portion of I-69 in Clinton and Shiawassee Counties as the Purple Heart Highway. This bill would contribute to Michigan's efforts to recognize Purple Heart recipients.

Supporting Argument

The Military Order of the Purple Heart has identified highways or roads in all 50 states and Puerto Rico for which it will seek designation as the Purple Heart Trail. Such an extensive and visible commemoration would ensure that Americans continue to remember the sacrifices made by U.S. military personnel in combat. Some states already have designated the Trail and posted signs for it. In addition to Virginia, these states include Georgia, Kentucky, Montana, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Utah. Legislative action to designate the Purple Heart Trail reportedly is

under way in all of the states that have not yet done so.

Response: According to testimony before the Senate Senior Citizens and Veterans Affairs Committee, the Military Order of the Purple Heart would like Michigan's entire length of I-69, from the Indiana border to Port Huron, to be part of the interstate Purple Heart Trail. This would dovetail with the designation of I-69 being sought in Indiana, where the Purple Heart Trail would extend from the Michigan border to Indianapolis. The bill, however, identifies only the portion of I-69 in Branch County for designation as the Purple Heart Trail.

Legislative Analyst: Patrick Affholter

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would have no fiscal impact on State or local government.

Fiscal Analyst: Craig Thiel

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.