

Legislative Analysis



FIREFIGHTERS MEMORIAL DAY

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House Bill 4357 (Substitute H-1)

Sponsor: Rep. Tory Rocca

Committee: Government Operations

First Analysis (5-4-05)

BRIEF SUMMARY: The bill would establish May 4th as Firefighters Memorial Day

FISCAL IMPACT: The bill would have no fiscal impact on the state or local units of government.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Each day, firefighters throughout the state risk their lives to protect individuals and communities from the ravages of uncontrolled fires. Each year, more than 100 firefighters are killed in the line of duty across the nation. Over the last 15 years, approximately two dozen firefighters in Michigan have been killed in the line of duty, including a captain with the Summit Township Fire Department who died in late January while responding to a house fire in Jackson County.

Last session, the legislature and governor enacted legislation establishing May 15th of each year as Police Officers Memorial Day. It has been suggested that May 4th, the International Firefighters Day, be designated in Michigan as Firefighters Memorial Day to honor the brave men and women who have lost their lives in the line of duty.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

House Bill 4357 would establish May 4th of each year as Firefighters Memorial Day "in recognition of the men and women who have lost their lives while serving as firefighters in the State of Michigan." The bill would amend Public Act 438 of 2004, which established May 15th of each year as Police Officers Memorial Day.

Flags at public buildings would be lowered at half staff. The bill would encourage communities throughout the state to conduct a memorial ceremony, and individuals would be encouraged to pause and reflect on "the dedicated professionals who bravely chose to accept the personal risk and made the ultimate sacrifice while protecting and defending the public."

MCL 435.351 and 435.352

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

May 4th is the feast day of St. Florian, the patron saint of firefighters. Born around 250 AD in present-day Austria, Florian was an officer in the army of Roman Emperor Diocletian, an emperor who devoted much of his energy to the persecution of Christians. Florian, a Christian himself, confessed his faith to Aquilinus, a local governor, and surrendered to his soldiers as they were rounding up Christians. After refusing to recant his confession, Florian was severely tortured and set on fire. Surviving that, he was thrown into the Enns River with a large stone around his neck. His body was later retrieved from the river and given a proper burial on the site of what later became the Augustinian Monastery of St. Florian, near Linz, Austria. The monastery is also the burial site of Anton Bruckner, a Romantic period composer and organist. Inside the church, the ceiling frescoes that rise above the great Bruckner organ depict the Martyrdom of St. Florian. Among the miracles attributed to St. Florian is one in which he suppressed a fire using a single pitcher of water. He is also invoked as a powerful protector in times of danger from fire or water. (Background information derived from several sources, including the following websites: Catholic Online - www.catholic.org; St. Florian School, Chicago, Illinois <http://florian.hegewisch.net/school/index.html>; and St. Florian Augustine Monastery - <http://www.stift-st-florian.at/en/index.html>.)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The bill honors firefighters who have lost their lives in the line of duty by encouraging individuals and communities in the state to take a moment to remember the sacrifices these men and women, and their families, have made for the greater society.

POSITIONS:

The Michigan Professional Firefighters Union supports the bill. (5-3-05)

The Macomb County Fire Chiefs Association supports the bill. (5-3-05)

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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.