

# Legislative Analysis

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## PURPLE HEART MONUMENT

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**House Bill 5620 as introduced**

**Sponsor: Rep. John Garfield**

**House Committee: Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security**

**Senate Bill 764 as passed by the Senate**

**Sponsor: Sen. Jason E. Allen**

**House Committee: Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security**

**Senate Committee: Senior Citizens and Veterans Affairs**

### **First Analysis (2-9-06)**

**BRIEF SUMMARY:** Senate Bill 764 would require the erection of a monument to honor Michigan citizens who have received the Purple Heart Medal, with the monument to be located in Veterans Memorial Park in Lansing. House Bill 5620 would amend the Michigan Vietnam Veterans Memorial Act to revise the description of the boundaries of the Veterans Memorial Park, which was established under the act.

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

### **THE APPARENT PROBLEM:**

To commemorate the heritage of the Purple Heart, which is awarded to members of the armed forces who are wounded or killed as a result of enemy activity, and to memorialize the sacrifices of those who are awarded the medal, the Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH) is seeking to have a Purple Heart monument erected and dedicated in each state. Reportedly, 43 other states currently have a Purple Heart monument. MOPH representatives say that attempts to erect a Michigan monument "have failed to yield results." Some people feel that building a monument in that park to honor Michigan citizens who have been awarded the Purple Heart should be required statutorily. (See Background Information for more information on the Purple Heart.)

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

Senate Bill 764 would require the erection of a monument to honor Michigan citizens who have received the Purple Heart Medal. The monument would have to be located in Veterans Memorial Park in Lansing. The bill would create a new act, to be called the "Purple Heart Recognition Act."

The monument and all expenses associated with its erection would have to be paid for by the Michigan Chapter of the Military Order of the Purple Heart. The monument would have to conform to the style and design established by the Military Order of the Purple Heart of the United States of America.

"Veterans memorial park" would refer to memorial park established by the Michigan Vietnam Veterans Memorial Act.

House Bill 5620 would amend the Michigan Vietnam Veterans Memorial Act to revise the description of the boundaries of the Veterans Memorial Park, which was established under the act. [Reportedly, this will make room for the Purple Heart monument.]

The act currently describes the park as consisting of a 2.5-acre parcel measuring approximately 260.17 feet in an east-west direction and approximately 419.75 feet in a north-south direction. House Bill 5620 would describe the park as a **3.18-acre parcel** of land measuring approximately 260.17 feet in an east-west direction and approximately **533 feet in a north-south direction**. The legal description of the property would also be revised accordingly.

MCL 35.1055a

#### ***HOUSE COMMITTEE ACTION:***

The House Committee on Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security made no amendments to Senate Bill 764; it remains in the form as passed by the Senate. Information in this analysis, including the extensive background information, is derived from the Senate Fiscal Agency's analysis of the Senate-passed bill, dated 12-19-06.

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

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 reinstated 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:***

#### ***For:***

The Purple Heart is the oldest military decoration in the world still in 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. It would be a fitting tribute to Michigan soldiers wounded or killed in battle to honor them with a monument in the Veterans Memorial Park, which is located two blocks directly west of the State Capitol building, where a pedestrian pathway meets the Hall of Justice.

The Military Order of the Purple Heart reportedly is seeking to have a similar monument honoring Purple Heart Medal winners erected in each state. A representative of the MOPH testified before the Senate Committee on Senior Citizens and Veterans Affairs that there are approximately 60,000 Purple Heart recipients living in Michigan, but, while 43 other states apparently have Purple Heart monuments, Michigan still does not. Michigan should follow the example of other states and honor its Purple Heart Medal recipients with a monument in the Veterans Memorial Park.

### ***POSITIONS:***

The Department of Management and Budget has indicated support for the bills. (2-7-06)

The Military Order of the Purple Heart testified in support of the bills. (2-7-06)

The Veterans Memorial Park Commission has indicated support for House Bill 5620. (2-7-06)

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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.