

Legislative Analysis



SIGNATURE ON VEHICLE REGISTRATION

Mitchell Bean, Director
Phone: (517) 373-8080
<http://www.house.mi.gov/hfa>

Senate Bill 79 as passed by the Senate
Sponsor: Sen. Ron Jelinek
House Committee: Transportation
Senate Committee: Transportation

First Analysis (10-15-07)

BRIEF SUMMARY: The bill would amend the Michigan Vehicle Code (MCL 257.223) to delete a requirement that a vehicle owner, upon receiving a registration certificate, sign the certificate with pen and ink in the space provided. A violation of this requirement is a civil infraction.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Since 1949 the Michigan Vehicle Code has required the owner of a vehicle to sign the vehicle registration in a space provided on the back of the certificate. A violation of this requirement is a civil infraction. A person found responsible for the infraction could be ordered to pay a civil fine. Some people believe there is no pressing need to require a signature or to make the absence of a signature a violation of law. Also, some are concerned that the signature requirement makes automobile owners vulnerable to identify theft by requiring them to carry a signed document with personal information in their vehicles. They say that if the vehicle is stolen, the information on the registration could be used to cause personal loss or damage to the victim's credit rating. Legislation has been introduced to address these concerns.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend the Michigan Vehicle Code (MCL 257.223) to delete a requirement that a vehicle owner, upon receiving a registration certificate, sign the certificate with pen and ink in the space provided. A violation of this requirement is a civil infraction.

(A person found responsible for a civil infraction under the Vehicle Code may be ordered to pay a civil fine, which generally may not exceed \$100, as well as a justice system assessment of \$40. The person also may be taxed up to \$100 for costs of the action. See Fiscal Impact for additional information.)

FISCAL INFORMATION:

Under the bill, the amount of revenue generated for local libraries, local court funding units and the Justice System Fund (JSF) would see a slight decrease depending upon the reduction in civil infraction violations under the bill's provisions. Currently, the

recommended fine for a vehicle owner not having a valid signed registration is \$18, court costs are recommended to be \$35-\$53, and a justice system assessment of \$40 is required.

Because the \$18 in fine revenue for this civil infraction traffic violation would go to county treasurers for local libraries, there would be an indeterminate amount of funding reduction to those libraries depending upon the reduction in the number of civil infractions. Similarly, the governmental unit that funds the local court would see a reduction in revenue in lieu of not receiving the recommended \$35–53 in court costs. Since under current law, the JSF would receive a \$40 assessment for each civil infraction, under the bill, the JSF would see a slight decrease in revenue as well. The JSF supports various justice-related endeavors in the judicial branch, the Department of State Police, and the Department of Corrections.

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The requirement that a vehicle owner sign the back of a vehicle registration has been criticized as unnecessary. A driver carrying a valid registration who was ticketed for failing to sign the registration would find it unfair and obnoxious. (Reportedly, this has happened.) Some persons also argue that the signature requirement could increase the risk of identity theft. The use of electronic record systems to verify vehicle ownership render the signature requirement obsolete, say critics.

POSITIONS:

The Department of State has indicated support for the bill. (10-11-07)

Legislative Analyst: E. Best
Fiscal Analyst: Viola Bay Wild

■ 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.