

Legislative Analysis



VIOLET T. LEWIS MEMORIAL HIGHWAY

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Senate Bill 1137 as reported from House committee
Sponsor: Sen. Ian Conyers
House Committee: Transportation and Infrastructure
Senate Committee: Transportation
Complete to 12-17-18

Analysis available at
<http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

(Enacted as Public Act 476 of 2018)

SUMMARY:

Senate Bill 1137 would amend the Michigan Memorial Highway Act to designate the portion of highway M-10 located in the city of Detroit between the intersection with Meyers Road and the intersection with West Outer Drive as the “Violet T. Lewis Memorial Highway.”

The bill would take effect 90 days after its enactment.

Proposed MCL 250.1036a

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

According to committee testimony, the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, and the Michigan Women’s Hall of Fame, Violet Temple Lewis was born in Lima, Ohio in 1897. She graduated from Lima High School and enrolled in the secretarial program at Wilberforce University. After graduating from Wilberforce in 1917, she obtained her first professional job as secretary to the president of Selma University. In 1920, she took a better-paying job at the *Indianapolis Recorder*, where she worked until 1927. While there, she noticed that there were many unemployed young people, which prompted the idea of starting her own secretarial school.

After leaving the *Indianapolis Recorder*, she began working for a local businessman who offered her three months’ free use of one of his storefronts if she could establish a secretarial school within that time frame. On January 28, 1928 she opened the Lewis Business College but was unable to attract enough students to cover expenses for the school and her family. She took side jobs and eventually moved the school into her home.

In 1930, she became the first African American stenographer to work for the Indiana State Legislature while continuing to build her school enrollment. In 1932, Dr. Lewis started her own radio program, called “The Negro Melody Hour,” to promote Lewis Business College. The program was a success, and she moved the school out of her home into its own building.

Dr. Lewis opened a Detroit branch of the college in 1939, closed the Indianapolis branch in 1940, and opened a Cleveland branch in 1960. In 1978, the Detroit and Cleveland branches merged to create Lewis College of Business, receiving accreditation from the

North Central College of Business and Schools as a junior college. In 1987, the U.S. Secretary of Education designated Lewis College of Business as a Historical Black College and University (HBCU), and in 1992, Dr. Violet T. Lewis was inducted into the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame.

Dr. Lewis was also a co-founder of Gamma Phi Delta, a professional and business women's sorority with 87 chapters nationwide. As an educator, business, and community leader, Dr. Violet Temple Lewis' initiative and accomplishments paved the way for greater opportunity for all women and minorities. Designating a portion of highway M-10 in the city of Detroit would be an appropriate way to honor her leadership, her commitment to education, and her dedication to the citizens of Detroit and the state of Michigan.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Section 2 of the Michigan Memorial Highway Act indicates that the state transportation department shall provide for the erection of suitable markers indicating the name of the highway only "when sufficient private contributions are received to completely cover the cost of erecting and maintaining those markers." As a result, the bill has no state or local fiscal impact

POSITIONS:

The Michigan Department of Transportation is neutral on the bill. (12-11-18)

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