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House Bill 4723 (as passed by the House)
Sponsor: Representative Jason Morgan
House Committee: Transportation, Mobility, and Infrastructure
Senate Committee: Transportation and Infrastructure

Date Completed: 6-3-24

CONTENT

The bill would amend the Michigan Vehicle Code to require the SOS to develop a Merchant Marine special registration plate and issue the plate upon application to an individual or a spouse of an individual who was or had been a member of the United States Merchant Marine.

The bill would allow an individual who was or had been a member, or an individual whose spouse was or had been a member, of the United States Merchant Marine to apply to the SOS for a special registration plate that displayed an appropriate vignette preceding the registration numbers and had the words "Merchant Marine" inscribed beneath the registration numbers.

"Member of the United States Merchant Marine" would mean an individual who holds a past or present Merchant Mariner license or credential issued by the United States Coast Guard.

The application for this special registration plate would have to be on a form prescribed by the SOS and, if required by the SOS, be accompanied by any proof of the applicant or applicant's spouse being or having been a member of the United States Merchant Marine. Upon proper application, the SOS would have to issue one or more special registration plates for each applicant for use on a passenger vehicle. The special registration plate would expire on the birthday of the vehicle owner.

The Code allows the SOS to issue a tab for persons with disabilities to an individual who is or has been issued a Michigan motor vehicle registration plate. This tab is adhesive and displays the international wheelchair, or similar, symbol. An individual with such a tab *and* a Disabled Veteran registration plate is entitled to courtesy in parking the individual's vehicle. Under the bill, if a disabled individual applied for a Merchant Marine registration plate, that individual also would have to be issued a tab for persons with disabilities; however, the individual would have to present to the SOS a medical statement attesting to the individual's disability.

The Code also prescribes taxes that the SOS must collect when a vehicle is registered. Under the bill, an individual issued one or more Merchant Mariner registration plates would have to be assessed the applicable taxes. Additionally, the Code requires an applicant for a distinctive or commemorative plate to pay a \$5 service fee and an additional fee, varying by type of plate, when applying for a duplicate or replacement plate. The bill would exempt a Merchant Mariner plate from this service fee. When renewing, the applicant would not be required to furnish the proof provided to certify that the applicant or applicant's spouse was or had been a member of the United States Merchant Marine.

The use of a Merchant Mariner plate on a vehicle other than the vehicle for which the plate was issued, or by a person who did not qualify, would be a misdemeanor.

BACKGROUND

The United States Merchant Marine consists of civilian mariners who have received a merchant marine credential from the United States Coast Guard. Generally, merchant marines work in the commercial shipping industry. In past times of war, such as in World War II, merchant marines have assisted the United States Armed Forces with maritime transportation needs.¹

Legislative Analyst: Abby Schneider

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill could create some costs for the Department of State to produce a new vehicle registration plate for Merchant Marines; however, the costs should be absorbable within annual appropriations. There would be no service fee applied to this plate and the vehicle registration tax revenues would remain the same and be deposited into the Michigan Transportation Fund.

Additionally, the bill could have an indeterminate negative fiscal impact and an indeterminate positive fiscal impact on the State and local government. New misdemeanor arrests and convictions under the bill could increase resource demands on law enforcement, court systems, community supervision, and jails; however, it is unknown how many people would be prosecuted under the bill. Local jail costs vary by jurisdiction and thus costs for local governments would vary. Local revenue to local libraries could increase under the bill as any additional revenue from imposed fines would go to local libraries.

Fiscal Analyst: Joe Carrasco, Jr.

¹ Cronk, Terri Moon., Department of Defense News, "WWII Merchant Mariners receive Congressional Gold Medal", 2022.

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