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FORGED PARKING PERMIT FINES

House Bill 5898 with committee amendments First Analysis (6-11-98)

Sponsor: Rep. Paul Wojno
Committee: Transportation

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

The number of license plates or permits issued for persons with disabilities has more than doubled in five years, from 29,739 in 1992 to 63,677 in 1997, according to the Secretary of State's Office. An additional 154,196 drivers can park legally in blue wheel chair spaces because they have a temporary placard permit.

In 1994, the legislature tightened the rules for getting these parking permits, as reported in *The Detroit News* (4-3-98), and according to committee testimony. All permits now require a doctor's confirmation of temporary or permanent disability, and temporary permits that used to be valid for four years must now be renewed every six months with a new doctor's certification. The application for a permit contains a notice that Michigan law defines a person with a disability who has one or more of seven physical conditions. The conditions are listed, briefly described, and one or more must be checked by the person's physician. (See *BACKGROUND INFORMATION* for more information.)

Members of Paralyzed Veterans of America, through their state organizations in Michigan, Washington, and Florida, have brought the permit glut and the likely abuse of permits by undeserving people to the attention of policy makers. The veterans have interviewed disabled permit holders about the availability of disabled parking spaces, documented and videotaped permit violators, and pointed out that generic disabled parking placards are available through mail order catalogues.

Although using a fraudulent disabled parking permit is a misdemeanor for which a violator can be fined up to \$500 or 90 days in jail, or both, there is no minimum fine specified in the law. Members of the Paralyzed Veterans of America report that some district court judges assess fines of \$75 or reduce a series of fines to

\$50 each. Those who believe these fines are too low argue that a minimum fine of \$100 should be established in the law.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

Under the Michigan Vehicle Code, it is a misdemeanor, punishable by a fine of up to \$500, imprisonment for up to 30 days, or both, to copy or forge a certificate of identification, windshield placard, or free parking sticker issued for purposes of assisting a disabled person. House Bill 5898 would add selling to these offenses, and set a minimum \$100 fine. The bill would take effect October 1, 1998.

MCL 257.675

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Disabled parking permits have been available in Michigan since the enactment of Public Act 300 of 1949. An application form for a permit must be completed by a physician on behalf of a person with a disability. The form says "Michigan law defines a handicapper as a person who has one or more of the physical conditions described below," and it directs the doctor to circle one or more of the seven medical conditions listed. The conditions are described as follows.

- a. Legally blind. Corrected acuity level right eye; left eye; both eyes; visual field (in degrees)
- b. Is unable to walk more than 200 feet without having to stop and rest. (Give reason)
- c. Is unable to walk without the use of a wheelchair, walker, crutch, brace, prosthetic or other device, or without the assistance of another person, due to the loss of use of one or both legs or feet.

d. Has a lung disease from which the expiratory volume for one second, when measured by spirometry is less than one liter, or from which the arterial oxygen tension is less than 60mm/hg of room air at rest.

e. Has a cardiovascular condition which measures between 3 and 4 on the New York Heart Classification Scale, or which renders the patient incapable of meeting a minimum standard for cardiovascular health established by the American Heart Association and approved by the Michigan Department of Public Health.

f. Has an arthritic, neurological, or orthopedic condition that severely limits ability to walk. (Describe)

g. Has a persistent reliance upon an oxygen source other than ordinary air.

The permits allow persons with disabilities to park in spaces that are signed and painted in blue, and located close to public buildings. The 1991 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) set guidelines for the number of disabled parking spaces at commercial establishments. The basic requirement for new construction starts out at four disabled spaces for the first 100 parking spaces and goes to about 20 disabled spaces per 1,000 parking spaces, according to a code consultant for the Washington, D. C.-based Building Owners and Managers Association, and as reported in *The Detroit News*. (4-3-98)

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

The House Fiscal Agency notes that House Bill 5898 would have no fiscal impact. (6-10-98)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The number of disabled license plates or permits issued in Michigan has more than doubled in five years. In all, nearly 218,000 people had disabled licenses or permits in 1997--63,677 permanent license plates and 154,196 temporary placard permits. The Paralyzed Veterans of America organization believes there is a glut of legal permits in Michigan and nationwide, and further, Michigan veterans in that organization report that illegal permits also are available through at least one ready-made mail order catalogue store operating in New York. In order to punish violators of the law who use forged or

fraudulent permits, there should be a minimum fine specified in the law.

Response:

There is also need for an administrative policy change, as well as this change in statute. For the past two years, two members of the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America organization have been studying the state laws that regulate disabled parking. They have recommended an increase in penalties, and also that local police agencies keep a record of habitual offenders. What's more, they believe too many doctors are approving certificates that allow their patients to obtain permits. The veterans completing the study report that 80 percent of the physicians who help their patients apply for a disabled permit do so by checking the condition on the application that states the applicant "is unable to walk more than 200 feet without having to stop and rest." They believe this medical condition should be re-worded to describe a particular and more clearly debilitating condition, and that penalties for physicians who abuse the permit process should be increased, so that physicians will have an easier time denying the requests of undeserving patients who ask them to complete the application form. In addition to this legislation, then, it would seem that changes on the permit application form should be made by the Secretary of State's Office, in order to stem abuse of the disabled permit process.

POSITIONS:

The Office of the Secretary of State supports the bill. (6-10-98)

Analyst: J. Hunault

■ 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.