



**House
Legislative
Analysis
Section**

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**FIREFIGHTER AND EMT SPECIALTY
LICENSE PLATES**

**House Bill 5354 as introduced
First Analysis (5-14-02)**

**Sponsor: Rep. Rich Brown
Committee: Transportation**

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

According to the House Fiscal Agency, there are about 32,500 firefighters and 12,000 emergency medical technicians (EMTs) registered in Michigan. Many of these rescue personnel are volunteers who are unaffiliated with law enforcement agencies, or who are informally attached to local units of government to provide health and safety assistance to citizens. When volunteer firefighters or emergency rescue personnel respond to calls for assistance, they often travel in their own vehicles to the scenes of the accidents. Their personal vehicles are unmarked, and consequently they do not immediately identify their drivers and possibly other occupants as rescue workers whose expertise is needed at the accident site. When the rescue workers are stopped at check points established by law enforcement officers who already have arrived at the scene of the accident, their response time is slowed, and the risk to those who await their attention increases, since their arrival has been delayed.

In order to identify the vehicles of emergency fire and safety personnel, a special brightly colored license plate has been proposed.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

House Bill 5354 would amend the Michigan Vehicle Code to require that the secretary of state develop and issue two specialty license plates both red in color, one with the inscription "firefighter" and the other with the inscription "EMT." Under the bill, individuals who either were firefighters or EMTs (emergency medical technicians) could apply for the appropriate specialty registration plate, after providing to the secretary of state satisfactory proof of that status. An applicant for either plate would pay the regular registration tax and a \$5 service fee. A renewal tab would be issued upon payment of the regular registration tax and sufficient proof that the individual was still a firefighter or EMT; however, a service fee would not be collected for the renewal tab.

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FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

The House Fiscal Agency notes that estimates by the Department of State of the cost to produce the plates range from \$9.83 per plate to \$15.30 per plate. With the collection of the \$5.00 service fee, the department would lose between \$5 and \$10 on each plate provided. It also is estimated that there would be a one-time programming cost of \$100,000. There are approximately 32,500 Michigan firefighters and 12,000 emergency technicians (EMTs). It is not known how many firefighters and EMTs would request a specialty plate. The agency concludes that there would be an indeterminate negative fiscal impact to both the state and local units of government, as a result of reduced Michigan Transportation Fund revenue that would be collected by the Department of State. (5-8-02)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

A red license plate would help identify volunteer EMTs and firefighters who drive their own vehicles when they are called to the scene of an accident. Immediate identification would reduce the number of delays, as the volunteer personnel pass check-points at the accident scene. Without the stops to establish their identity and appropriate presence at the scene of the accident, their ability to assist those who need their services would be faster.

Against:

Although there are four different kinds of Michigan license plates issued in the state (the basic plate, the Michigan Splendor plate, various fundraising plates, and custom specialty license plates) all four plate categories share one characteristic: the original metal sheeting from which all are manufactured is blue in color. The common color keeps the cost of manufacturing the license plates low, about \$2.55 per plate. The special license plate that is suggested for firefighters and EMTs would require red metal sheeting, and because fewer than 82,000 plates would be manufactured, the red plate would require a high-cost short-run. This would increase the per plate cost at least three-fold, and perhaps more than five-fold--

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from between \$9.83 to \$15.30 more per license plate. Further, a one-time programming cost of \$100,000 for the special red-plate run has been estimated. Given that the Department of State is facing a \$20 million reduction in its budget, the increased cost of the license plate proposed by this legislation is a serious concern.

POSITIONS:

The Office of the Secretary of State is opposed to the bill in its current form. (5-8-02)

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.