

Legislative Analysis



ENSIGN FRANCIS FLAHERTY MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT MEMORIAL HIGHWAY

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House Bill 4337 as reported from committee

Sponsor: Rep. Angela Witwer

Committee: Transportation, Mobility and Infrastructure

Complete to 6-11-23

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

(Enacted as Public Act 307 of 2023)

SUMMARY:

House Bill 4337 would amend the Michigan Memorial Highway Act to designate M-50 in Eaton County from its intersection with highway I-69 to its intersection with Courthouse Drive as the “Ensign Francis Flaherty Medal of Honor Recipient Memorial Highway.” (This portion of M-50 is currently designated the “Ensign Francis Flaherty Memorial Highway.”)

The bill would also provide that, if sufficient private contributions are received to pay the cost of erecting and maintaining suitable markers for the portion of M-50 as described above, those markers must be designed to have “Ensign Francis Flaherty” on the first line, “Medal of Honor Recipient” on the second line, and “Memorial Highway” on the third line.

BACKGROUND:

According to committee testimony, the Defense POA/MIA Accounting Agency, and the *Lansing State Journal*, Francis Charles Flaherty was born in Charlotte, Michigan, on March 15, 1919. He enlisted in the Naval Reserve in July 1941 and was commissioned as an ensign in December of that year. During the December 1941 Japanese air attack on Pearl Harbor, Ensign Flaherty was serving on board the USS *Oklahoma* (BB-37). The order was given to abandon ship. As the ship was capsizing, Ensign Flaherty remained in a gun turret holding a flashlight to enable the rest of the turret crew to see their way of escape, sacrificing his own life to do so. For this sacrificial act of heroism, Ensign Flaherty was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

Flaherty and 428 other sailors were entombed in the *Oklahoma*. At the time of his death, it was not possible to identify Francis’ body. From December 1941 to June 1944, Navy personnel recovered the remains of the deceased crew. They were subsequently interred in the Halawa and Nu’uanu Cemeteries. Flaherty and many others were buried as “unknowns” in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, Hawaii. On September 30, 2019, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPPA) identified the remains of Ensign Francis C. Flaherty. Surviving members of his family were notified, and the process began to bring Ensign Flaherty home so he could be finally laid to rest in his hometown.

Dedicating a portion of M-50 in Eaton County would be an appropriate way to recognize Medal of Honor recipient Ensign Francis Charles Flaherty for his ultimate sacrifice and his dedication to the United States Navy core values of honor, courage, and commitment.

MCL 250.1103

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 indicated a neutral position on the bill. (6-6-23)

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■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House Fiscal Agency staff for use by House members in their deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.