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**COUNTY VETERANS' AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

**House Bill 5009 as introduced
First Analysis (12-10-03)**

**Sponsor: Rep. Jacob Hoogendyk
Committee: Veterans Affairs and
Homeland Security**

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Public Act 192 of 1953 permits a county board of commissioners to create a county department of veterans' affairs, to be administered by a committee of three to five veterans appointed by the board. The act further provides that not more than one member of the committee can be representative of a single war or conflict. For instance, the committee can only have one member who served in World War II. The problem, however, is that as many older veterans (particularly those from WW II) pass away, county commissions are finding it increasingly difficult to find veterans willing to serve on the committee. It has been suggested, as one way of alleviating any staffing pressures, that county veterans' affairs committees contain more than one member per war or conflict.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend Public Act 192 of 1953 to allow up to two members on a county veterans affairs committee who have served in the same war or conflict.

MCL 35.621

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

This particular provision of law was last amended with the enactment of Public Act 108 of 1996 (enrolled House Bill 4771). Prior to that amendment, the act, as last amended in 1973, provided that the committee would be composed of four members - one veteran from each of the World Wars, the Korean War and the Vietnam Conflict. The act further provided that if a World War I veteran willing to serve on the committee could not be found, a veteran of any war would be permitted to fill the position.

Since its enactment in 1953, the act has specifically set the membership of the committee. The 1953 act provided that the committee be composed of three

members, at least one of whom has served in either World War. The act also contained a provision that limited its applicability to counties with a certain population. Over the years, the population provisions were dropped, and the committee membership was expanded to include veterans of certain military actions. At the time of the 1996 amendment eliminating specific references to a war or conflict, it was argued that it was becoming increasingly difficult to locate World War I veterans who are willing and able to serve on these committees.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

The House Fiscal Agency notes that the bill has no materialized fiscal impact. (12-8-03)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

Quite simply, the bill helps county commissions find veterans willing to serve on the county's veterans' affairs committee, which oversees the county's department of veterans affairs and helps coordinate services to veterans. Under the current law, these committees can only have one member per war or conflict. This presents a major problem in staffing these committees. As time passes, it becomes increasingly difficult to find World War II veterans willing to serve on the committee. Many have passed away or are simply unable, due to health and physical limitations, to serve on the committee. Some years ago, the same problem arose with World War I veterans, and it will eventually arise with veterans of the Korean War and Vietnam. It is also difficult to recruit younger veterans, such as those serving in the first Gulf War, as they have increased family obligations. Today, veterans of military actions in Korea and Vietnam are the prime group of veterans who are able and willing to serve on county veterans affairs committees. These are people are at or near retirement age and whose children have since left

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home. However, the statute provides that only one person per war or conflict can serve on the committee, thereby creating a problem with supply and demand. Thus, by allowing up to two members per war or conflict to serve on these committees, the bill better enables county commissions to appoint veterans to their respective veterans' affairs committees.

POSITIONS:

The Department of Michigan Veterans of Foreign Wars supports the bill. (12-9-03)

The Michigan Association of Counties indicated that it supports the bill. (12-9-03)

The Commanders Group of Veterans Organizations indicated that it supports the bill. (12-9-03)

The Kalamazoo County Veterans Affairs Committee testified in support of the bill. (12-9-03)

Purple Heart indicated that it supports the bill. (12-9-03)

Analyst: M. Wolf

■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.