

Date of Hearing: June 17, 2024

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Lori D. Wilson, Chair

SB 930 (Laird) – As Amended April 25, 2024

SENATE VOTE: 33-6

SUBJECT: Memorial highways: Memorial Highway Signage Fund

SUMMARY: Establishes the Memorial Highway Signage Fund and makes all state General Fund appropriations, public or private bequeaths, and other donations available upon appropriation by the Legislature, to the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) for costs related to erecting signage for memorial highway designations for individuals who have promoted racial and gender equity.

EXISTING LAW:

Assigns Caltrans the responsibility of operating and maintaining state highways, including the installation and maintenance of highway signs. (Streets and Highways Code Section 91 and Vehicle Code 21400)

FISCAL EFFECT:

According to the Senate Committee on Appropriations:

“This bill would result in unknown cost pressures, potentially in excess of \$50,000, to appropriate General Fund revenues into the new special fund.”

COMMENTS: Every year the Assembly and Senate Transportation committees consider resolutions to name stretches of highways or erect signage alongside highways in order to memorialize individuals who have provided extraordinary public service or some exemplary contribution to the public good.

Currently, most named highways in California are for fallen male public safety officers. Because of historical and current gender imbalances in public safety and transportation-related professions, the large majority of naming resolutions have been for men. Since 2012, about 90% of the memorial resolutions passed by this committee have been for men. The average cost of constructing a memorial sign is \$7,000-11,000.

While these individuals have made a great sacrifice, they do not fully represent the wide range of public service contributions, as well as the gender and racial diversity of California’s communities. The Assembly Transportation Committee is committed to working with Caltrans to improve the naming process to ensure greater equity and to better represent the diversity of California. It is the intent of the Assembly Transportation Committee to use the memorial highway naming process to honor deceased Californians who have made significant public service contributions and also to reflect the diversity of our state.

In September 2020, the California Natural Resources Agency, the California Department of State Parks, and Caltrans announced “Steps to Address Discriminatory Names, Inequities in State Parks and Transportation System Features.” This announcement states that, “Caltrans will carry out a detailed review of all named assets located on the state transportation system and develop a proposal identifying those to be renamed or rescinded.” It is unclear what the status of this effort is, but it is possible that as part of this effort the Administration could consider strategies to increase the diversity of memorial naming statewide.

This bill establishes a new account in the State Treasury as a repository for any state General Fund appropriations, public or private donations or grants, and any federal funds that would be available to Caltrans, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to erect signage memorializing individuals who have promoted racial or gender equity. A General Fund Special Account is a legislatively created account or dedicated revenues within the General Fund. Moneys credited to such accounts may be used only for the purposes specified in legislation. These accounts are treated as special funds, and revenues and expenditures are included in the special funds totals in the summary schedules of the budget. They are excluded from the General Fund unrestricted revenues, expenditures and reserves.

Committee Comments: The fund this bill creates would cover some or all of the costs associated with constructing a memorial sign for individuals who have advanced racial or gender equity. Historically, the funds for a memorial sign have been provided by the private group that is sponsoring the memorial resolution. By creating a fund to cover those costs, the author hopes to encourage more groups to bring forward a greater diversity of potential honorees.

It is unclear how much of a barrier funding for signage has been for bringing forward more diverse nominees. It is possible that having such a fund will help ease the barrier to raising up people from other professions and backgrounds. Ultimately, the diversity of honorees is dependent upon who legislators choose to honor with memorial resolutions. Legislators could support this effort by soliciting more diverse potential honorees from their districts.

Highway memorials generally are introduced as concurrent resolutions, and thereby do not have the force of law. However to make an appropriation from the fund established under this bill, the memorial naming would require an actual bill. This may create a barrier to utilizing the funds, but will allow legislators to duly consider whether the person honored truly did advance racial or gender equity as the fund established by this bill would require.

However in the event of that a fiscal committee is considering multiple resolutions simultaneously it may be difficult to determine how the funds should be distributed, and it is possible there may not be enough monies available in the fund to pay for all of the signs being considered. This bill does not address what would be done in those circumstances. Also, it is unclear how or when the intended recipients of the fund would be able to access the funds.

According to the author, “California is a leader when it comes to promoting diversity, equity, and equality, but who we have chosen to honor though our memorial highways has not been representative of the diversity of our state. While California has a rich history of women who have provided extraordinary public service and made exemplary contributions to the public good, the vast majority of memorial highways are named for men. Senate Bill 930 seeks to address this inequity and promote increased racial and gender representation in memorial

highway designations by creating a fund that covers the cost of signage that memorialize individuals who have promoted racial and gender equity.”

Previous legislation. AB 776 (Holden), Chapter 543, Statutes of 2023 requires Caltrans to work with specified entities to identify appropriate locations for highway signs and markers to recognize the historical and cultural importance of California tribes and tribal lands along State Route 210 in the Counties of Los Angeles and San Bernardino, and to erect those signs and markers.

AB 678 (Gaines), Chapter 747, Statutes of 2007 requires Caltrans to, among other provisions, place signs encouraging people not to drink and drive and memorializing victims of drunk driving along state highways, and to adopt program guidelines for the application and placement of these signs.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None on file

Opposition

None on file

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