

HOUSE BILL 2878

By Casada

AN ACT to name a bridge on State Route 96 in Williamson County in honor of the late Master Sergeant James W. "Tre" Ponder III, United States Army.

WHEREAS, from time to time, the members of this General Assembly have seen fit to name certain highways and bridges to honor the memory of those courageous members of the United States Armed Forces who gave their lives while serving our nation; and

WHEREAS, no person is more deserving of this honor than the late Master Sergeant (MSG) James W. "Tre" Ponder III, United States Army, who made the ultimate sacrifice for his country on June 28, 2005, in eastern Afghanistan while participating in a mission to rescue a NAVY Seal team; and

WHEREAS, MSG Ponder followed the patriotic tradition for which Williamson County and the Volunteer State are renowned by enlisting and serving with distinction in the United States Army after graduating from Battle Ground Academy in Franklin and attending Auburn University; and

WHEREAS, at the time of his death, MSG Ponder was a flight commander with the Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment at Fort Campbell; and

WHEREAS, although Tre Ponder was an unlikely hero in the eyes of some, his father-in-law, Tom Miller, former Mayor of Franklin, has described him as "not real tall, somewhat thin, but tough as nails," and there can be no doubt that Tre was a true warrior whose faith in God led him to serve in the military and sustained him throughout his missions; and

WHEREAS, fondly remember by his family and many friends as having "a warm smile, a cheerful laugh, and a mischievous nature, "Tre" was a highly skilled fisherman and hunter who loved to take his daughters along to enjoy the outdoors; and

WHEREAS, a loving son, husband, and father, Tre Ponder is survived by his father,

James W. Ponder, his mother, Rebecca Ponder, his wife, Leslie M. Ponder, and his daughters, Samantha and Elizabeth Ponder; and

WHEREAS, MSG Ponder served with great courage and gallantry, giving his life for his country and for the cause in which he believed, and for that ultimate sacrifice, he deserves proper recognition; as a member of the United States Army, he proudly continued an essential tradition of American society: the concept of the citizen-soldier; and

WHEREAS, MSG Ponder's dedication to excellence in the military and his love of his family, his fellow soldiers, and country, exemplified in his sacrifice of life itself in defense of all that he held dear, stand as enduring examples of all the characteristics that have ensured the continued freedom of our nation and the preservation of its ideals over the course of our history; and

WHEREAS, Tre Ponder selflessly gave his life while serving his country, and it is thus most appropriate that a certain bridge on State Route 96, located a mere two houses from the home in which he resided as a child in his hometown of Franklin, should be named to honor his memory; now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, Bridge No. 94-SR0960013 spanning the Harpeth River on State Route 96 near Pinkerton Park in the City of Franklin, Williamson County is hereby designated the "James W. "Tre" Ponder III Memorial Bridge" in recognition of the life of valor and death in combat of Master Sergeant James W. "Tre" Ponder III, United States Army, one of Tennessee's most heroic citizens.

SECTION 2. The department of transportation is directed to erect suitable signs or to affix suitable markers designating the bridge described in Section 1 as the "James W. "Tre" Ponder III Memorial Bridge". The cost of such signage shall be funded in accordance with Tennessee Code Annotated, § 54-1-133.

SECTION 3. The erection of such signs shall be within the guidelines prescribed by the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices.

SECTION 4. This act shall become operative only if the federal highway administrator advises the commissioner of transportation in writing that the provisions of this act shall not render Tennessee in violation of federal laws and regulations and subject to penalties prescribed therein.

SECTION 5. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.