

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESB 5626

As Reported by House Committee On:

State Government

Title: An act relating to the definition of veteran.

Brief Description: Modifying the definition of veteran.

Sponsors: Senators Rasmussen, Oke, Swecker, Winsley, Snyder, Shin, Roach, Patterson, McAuliffe and Benton; by request of Joint Select Committee on Veterans' and Military Affairs.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government: 2/28/02, 3/1/02 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Engrossed Bill (As Amended by House Committee)

- The definition of veteran is expanded to include peacetime veterans and those who have fulfilled their initial military service obligation for purposes of: 1) veterans' preference on civil service exams; 2) free license plates; 3) county aid to indigent veterans; 4) restrictions on sending veterans to almshouses; and 5) county burials for indigent veterans.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Romero, Chair; Miloscia, Vice Chair; McMorris, Ranking Minority Member; McDermott, Schindler, Schmidt and Upthegrove.

Staff: Marsha Reilly (786-7135).

Background:

The definition of "veteran" is used throughout statute as an eligibility requirement for various benefits, including retirement service credit of up to five years for fire fighters' pensions, police relief and pensions in first class cities, and PERS Plan I retirement; exemption from payment of fees at state universities, regional universities and The

Evergreen State College; admission to the soldiers' and veterans' homes; veterans' preference on civil service exams; free license plates for disabled veterans and prisoners of war; county aid to indigent veterans and families; restrictions on sending veterans or families to almshouses; and county burial of indigent deceased veterans.

For purposes of these benefits, veteran is defined as a person who has received an honorable discharge or received a discharge for physical reasons with an honorable record and one who meets at least one of the following criteria:

- Served between World War I and World War II or during any period of war, including World War I, World War II, the Korean conflict; the Vietnam era between August 5, 1964, and May 7, 1975, the Persian Gulf War, periods of any future declaration of war by Congress, and armed conflicts if the participant was awarded the respective campaign badge or medal; and
- Received the armed forces expeditionary medal, or marine corps and navy expeditionary medal, for opposed action on foreign soil.

Washington state drivers' licenses remain in full force and effect for any person serving in the Armed Forces of the United States. This also applies to the service member's spouse or dependent children as long as they reside with the service member.

The original bill was amended in the Senate to remove the requirement that the new definition be applied to pension plans.

Summary of Amended Bill:

An additional definition for "veteran" is given and includes:

- Peacetime veterans and those who have fulfilled their initial military service obligation in any branch of the armed services and the National Guard and reserves;
- Women's air forces service pilots;
- Those in the National Guard, reserves or Coast Guard who have been called into federal service by a presidential select reserve call up for at least 180 cumulative days;
- Civil service crewmembers with service aboard a U.S. army transport service or U.S. naval transportation service vessel through December 31, 1946;
- Those who served in the Philippine Armed Forces or Scouts in World War II.

Benefits available to veterans under this definition include: scoring preference on civil service exams; free license plates for disabled veterans and prisoners of war; county aid to indigent veterans; restrictions on sending veterans to almshouses; and county burials.

"Service members" eligible for a continuing valid drivers license are defined as any person currently serving in a branch of service as identified in the new definition of veteran.

The Higher Education Coordinating Board and Joint Committee on Pension Policy must study what would be the effect on their respective agencies of changing to the more inclusive definition of veteran.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill:

Clarifies the language defining service member for purposes of eligibility for a continuing valid drivers licence as any person currently serving in a branch of service as identified in the new definition of veteran, rather than any person whose service at the time of application meets the new definition of veteran, and makes other technical corrections.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 26, 2002.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: This bill recognizes those who served in the armed forces faithfully and honorably but are not granted the status of "veteran" in their home state. It leaves intact the definition of a "war time" veteran, and gives those who served between conflicts the right to be called veteran. The time is right to recognize the service of all our veterans.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Senator Rasmussen, prime sponsor; Dennis Primoli, Veterans Coalition; and John King, Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs.