
State Government Committee

ESB 5626

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 Summary of Engrossed Bill

- 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.

Hearing Date: 2/28/02

Staff: Marsha Reilly (786-7135).

Background:

The definition of "veteran" is used throughout statute for various benefits for veterans, 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 deceased indigent 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 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 United States 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; and
- Those who served in the Philippine Armed Forces or Scouts in World War II.

New benefits for 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 identified in the new definition of veteran. Specifically, it allows National Guard service members to be eligible for this benefit.

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.

Rulemaking Authority: No express authority.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 26, 2002.

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