

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1707

As Passed House:
March 13, 2019

Title: An act relating to modifying qualifications for disabled veterans to receive fee exempt license plates.

Brief Description: Modifying qualifications for disabled veterans to receive fee exempt license plates.

Sponsors: Representatives Gildon, Ryu, Jenkin, Boehnke, Riccelli, Vick, Reeves, Graham, Shea, Peterson, Young, Shewmake, Kilduff and Leavitt.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 2/18/19, 2/27/19 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/13/19, 95-0.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Decreases the percentage rate of service-related disability compensation required to qualify for the Disabled American Veteran or Former Prisoner of War special license plates from 100 percent to 70 percent.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 31 members: Representatives Fey, Chair; Slatter, 2nd Vice Chair; Valdez, 2nd Vice Chair; Wylie, 1st Vice Chair; Barkis, Ranking Minority Member; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Young, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Boehnke, Chambers, Chapman, Dent, Doglio, Dufault, Entenman, Eslick, Goehner, Gregerson, Irwin, Kloba, Lovick, McCaslin, Mead, Orcutt, Ortiz-Self, Paul, Pellicciotti, Ramos, Riccelli, Shea, Shewmake and Van Werven.

Staff: Patricia Hasan (786-7292).

Background:

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

The Department of Licensing (DOL) issues special vehicle license plates that may be used in lieu of standard license plates. Some special license plates are sponsored by a governmental or nonprofit organization and are available to all Washington residents for an additional fee that is due annually upon vehicle registration renewal. Other special license plates are available to individuals who meet certain requirements. Two such special license plates are the Disabled American Veteran license plate and the Former Prisoner of War license plate.

To qualify for a Disabled American Veteran license plate or a Former Prisoner of War license plate, a veteran as defined by state law must be recorded as the registered owner of the motor vehicle on which the Disabled American Veteran or Former Prisoner of War license plates will be displayed, and:

- provide certification from the Veterans Administration (VA) or the military service from which the veteran was discharged that the veteran has a service-connected disability rating;
- have lost the use of both hands or one foot;
- have been captured and incarcerated by an enemy of the United States during a period of war with the United States and have received a Prisoner of War medal;
- have become blind in both eyes as a result of military service; or
- be rated by the VA or the military service from which the veteran was discharged and be receiving service-connected compensation at the 100 percent rate that is expected to exist for more than one year.

The DOL may periodically verify the 100 percent rating of the registered vehicle owner.

Disabled American Veteran license plates and Former Prisoner of War license plates are issued for one personal use vehicle without the payment of any vehicle license fees, license plate fees, or excise taxes, effectively making them permanent license plates. Additionally, in lieu of Disabled American Veteran license plates or Former Prisoner of War license plates, a qualifying veteran may apply for a standard issue license plate or any qualifying special license plate and receive the full benefit of the vehicle license fee and excise tax exemption provided for the Disabled American Veteran and Former Prisoner of War license plates.

Disabled American Veteran license plates and Former Prisoner of War license plates may be transferred from one motor vehicle to another motor vehicle owned by the veteran upon application to the DOL, county auditor or other agent, or subagent appointed by the Director of the DOL. Any unauthorized use of a Disabled American Veteran license plate or a Former Prisoner of War license plate is a gross misdemeanor.

The VA generally determines compensation for disabled veterans based on the percentage of service-connected disability rating. The disability rating is based on evidence provided to the VA by the veteran, the results of an exam performed by a VA medical professional, and other information that may be obtained by the VA. If a veteran has two or more separate service-related disabilities, they may be aggregated to calculate a final total percentage rating. In addition, the VA may consider the individual unemployability of the veteran to increase the percentage of compensation beyond the service-connected disability rating up to 100 percent.

Summary of Bill:

A veteran may qualify for Disabled American Veteran or Former Prisoner of War license plates if the veteran has a service-connected disability and is receiving service-connected disability compensation at the 70 percent rate or higher.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Current law allows veterans with a disability rating of 100 percent to get a Disabled American Veteran license plate at no cost. This bill seeks to expand the pool of eligible veterans who can receive this license plate to include those veterans who have a disability rating of 70 percent or above. The VA may not always rate veterans with disabilities accurately so if a veteran's medical team has rated their disability level at or near 100 percent, the VA may conduct different math to come up with a disability rate at 70 percent or less.

Some people may say that the state should preserve the integrity of this license plate by continuing to allow only veterans with the highest disability rating to obtain these license plates, but the United States has been a nation at war since about 2001, and United States veterans have been undergoing one of the highest operational tempos in this current war time since World War II. Veterans have given a lot, and the least the state can do is to give a little back.

The DOL notes that of the total number of veterans who fall into the 70 percent or above disability rating category, just under 16,000 will take advantage of this no-fee Disabled American Veteran license plate. Each of the license plates costs about \$2.25 to produce. As the DOL notes, there is likely to be a surge of utilization in the first year of implementation that will lead to higher costs in the first year, and then the costs will level off to just the workload necessary to handle new applicants.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Gildon, prime sponsor; and Kristina Sawyckyj.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.