
**Innovation, Community & Economic
Development, & Veterans Committee**

HB 2014

Brief Description: Concerning the definition of veteran and restoring honor to veterans.

Sponsors: Representatives Volz, Donaghy, Leavitt, Couture, Ryu, Reed, Ormsby, Graham, Sandlin, Jacobsen, Schmidt, Harris, Steele, Fey, Riccelli, Low, Reeves, Paul, Macri and Shavers; by request of Attorney General.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Standardizes requirements relating to qualifying discharges for the purpose of establishing eligibility for various benefit programs for veterans.
- Provides a definition of "qualifying discharge."

Hearing Date: 1/10/24

Staff: Emily Poole (786-7106).

Background:

Veteran Status.

An individual's status as a veteran is used as an eligibility requirement for various benefit and assistance programs.

Benefits for general service status include, among others:

- certain services administered by the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA);

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

- license plates for disabled veterans and prisoners of war;
- admission to state soldiers' and veterans' homes;
- veterans' scoring preference on civil service exams;
- veteran homeownership down payment assistance programs; and
- license extensions for licenses issued by the Department of Licensing or the Department of Health.

A separate status is recognized for veterans who served in a period of war or conflict. Such combat veterans may be eligible to receive additional benefits, including, but not limited to:

- higher scoring preference on civil service exams;
- participation in a designated shared leave pool program;
- special designated license plates;
- property tax relief for senior widows and widowers of veterans; and
- tuition waivers or reductions.

In addition, the state-sponsored retirement systems provide credit to combat veterans for interruptive military service for up to five years of service.

Characterization of Service.

For the purpose of establishing eligibility for various benefits and programs, veteran status is generally recognized for a service member who received an honorable discharge or other excusable discharge. Prior to its formal repeal in 2011, a United States Department of Defense policy established that a service member may receive an other than honorable discharge because of the service member's sexual orientation.

Summary of Bill:

Qualifying Discharge.

The term "qualifying discharge" is added to provisions establishing various benefit programs for veterans, generally replacing references to "honorable discharge." "Qualifying discharge" is defined as:

- a discharge with an honorable characterization of service;
- a discharge with a general under honorable conditions characterization of service;
- a discharge with an other than honorable characterization of service if the applicant provides certain documentation from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs showing eligibility for or receipt of monetary benefits; or
- any characterization of service if the reason for discharge was listed as due to:
 - a person's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression;
 - statements, consensual sexual conduct, or consensual acts relating to sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression; or
 - the disclosure of statements, conduct, or acts relating to sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression to military officials.

The WDVA is required to develop and implement an outreach program to ensure that veterans are aware of state veterans' benefits and programs.

Repealed Statutes.

The provision establishing that a physical disability discharge is generally considered an honorable discharge for purposes of admitting certain veterans to the Washington State Bar Association is repealed.

The requirement that county auditors record certificates of discharge for veterans of World War I and the Spanish-American War is repealed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 3, 2024.

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