
Appropriations Committee

HB 2544

Brief Description: Concerning the definition of veteran.

Sponsors: Representatives Paul, Dufault, Leavitt, Graham, Smith, Volz and Ormsby.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Expands the definition of “period of war” for veterans’ benefits in state pension systems, legal assistance, scoring criteria on civil service exams, and other programs, to include any armed conflicts where an expeditionary or campaign medal was awarded, rather than listing specific conflicts.

Hearing Date: 1/23/20

Staff: David Pringle (786-7310).

Background:

The state provides certain recognition benefits to persons based on their status as a military service veteran. Veteran status generally is recognized for a service member who received an honorable discharge, or other excusable discharge. Benefits for such general service status include, among others: free license plate decals; admission to state soldiers' and veterans' homes; veterans' scoring preference on civil service exams; veteran homeownership down payment assistance programs; and certain services administered by the state Department of Veterans Affairs.

A separate status is recognized for veterans who served in a period of war or conflict. Such combat veterans are 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; and property tax relief for senior widows of veterans. In addition, the state-sponsored retirement systems provide credit for interruptive military service, for up to five years of service. The employee's contributions are waived if the

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interruptive service occurred during a period of a war or conflict that qualifies under the state definition for combat veteran status.

The definition for a combat veteran includes a veteran who received an honorable discharge, or is actively serving honorably and has either: (1) served in a period of war; or (2) received the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal (AFEM) for combat in a foreign territory. The Department of Defense has designated certain conflicts under which service qualifies for the AFEM. In addition to the AFEM, certain conflicts also qualify for specific medals of participation.

A period of war includes World Wars I and II, the Korean conflict, the Vietnam era, the Persian Gulf War, and any future period that includes a congressional declaration of war. A period of war also covers certain armed conflicts where the participant has been awarded a campaign badge or medal. Such conflicts include: the crisis in Lebanon; the invasion of Grenada; Operation Just Cause (Panama); Operation Restore Hope (Somalia); Operation Uphold Democracy (Haiti); Operation Joint Endeavor (Bosnia); Operation Noble Eagle; Operation Enduring Freedom (southern or central Asia); Operation Iraqi Freedom (Persian Gulf); Operation Inherent Resolve (Iraq and Syria), and Operation Freedom's Sentinel (Afghanistan).

Summary of Bill:

The definition of “period of war” is expanded for veterans’ benefits in state pension systems, legal assistance, scoring criteria on civil service exams, and other programs, to include any armed conflicts where an expeditionary or campaign medal was awarded. The list of specific conflicts that would qualify if an expeditionary or campaign medal was awarded is removed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 16, 2020.

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