

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2544

As Reported by House Committee On:
Appropriations

Title: An act relating to the definition of veteran.

Brief Description: Concerning the definition of veteran.

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

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Appropriations: 1/23/20, 2/6/20 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute 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 a campaign medal was awarded, rather than listing specific conflicts.
- Requires the Select Committee on Pension Policy and the Law Enforcement Officers' and Firefighters' Plan 2 Retirement Board to study the provision of free military service credit to members awarded an expeditionary medal, but not a campaign medal.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 33 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Robinson, 1st Vice Chair; Bergquist, 2nd Vice Chair; Stokesbary, Ranking Minority Member; MacEwen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Rude, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Caldier, Chandler, Chopp, Cody, Corry, Dolan, Dye, Fitzgibbon, Hansen, Hoff, Hudgins, Kilduff, Kraft, Macri, Mosbrucker, Pettigrew, Pollet, Ryu, Schmick, Senn, Springer, Steele, Sullivan, Sutherland, Tarleton, Tharinger and Ybarra.

Staff: David Pringle (786-7310).

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 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 Washington 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 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 Substitute 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 a campaign medal was awarded. The list of specific conflicts that would qualify if an expeditionary or campaign medal was awarded is removed.

The Select Committee on Pension Policy and the Law Enforcement Officers' and Firefighters' Plan 2 Retirement Board, with the assistance of the Office of the State Actuary, the Department of Retirement Systems, the Washington State Military Department, and the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs, are required to study the provision of military service credit to members of the retirement systems, in particular the cost of

expanding free military service credit to members who received an expeditionary medal, but not a campaign medal. The report is due to the Legislature on January 2, 2021.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill limits the application of the new definition of "period of war" to members that earned campaign badges or medals, while the original bill applied to both campaign and expeditionary medals. The substitute bill adds the study of the provision of free military service credit to members awarded an expeditionary medal, but not a campaign medal.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) In some cases, members of the retirement plans serve in periods of war but have not received campaign or expeditionary medals. Some veterans that have served in conflicts have not received free service credit, and they should.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Paul, prime sponsor.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.