
Appropriations Committee

HB 1804

Brief Description: Concerning interruptive military service credit for members of the state retirement systems.

Sponsors: Representatives Paul, Griffey, Leavitt, Bronoske, Gilday, Bergquist, Graham and Young; by request of Select Committee on Pension Policy, LEOFF Plan 2 Retirement Board.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Expands the definition of veteran for purposes of veterans' benefits in state pension systems, legal assistance, scoring criteria on civil service exams, and other programs, to include members that were awarded an expeditionary medal.

Hearing Date: 1/20/22

Staff: David Pringle (786-7310).

Background:

The state provides certain benefits to people based on their status as a military service veteran. 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, reduced or no-cost service credit for retirement pension purposes, higher scoring preference on civil service exams, participation in a designated shared leave pool program, and property tax relief for senior widows and widowers of veterans.

Members of the state's retirement systems who leave employment to enter the armed forces of the United States may be eligible for interruptive military service credit. Interruptive military

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service credit applies to all Washington state retirement systems, and for some purposes is required by federal law. A member qualifies for this benefit when a leave of absence is taken from a Department of Retirement System covered position to serve in the United States military. When this occurs, membership in the retirement system is considered to be interrupted. Non-interruptive military service credit, sometimes referred to as prior military service credit, was last provided to new members entering the retirement systems before 2003, in only the Washington State Patrol Retirement System Plan 1.

To qualify for no-cost interruptive military service credit, the member must meet the definition of veteran in statute. The statute limits veterans to persons serving during a period of war in certain listed conflicts or those awarded a campaign badge or medal in any conflict.

The Department of Defense (DOD) awards medals or badges to service members who served during a specified conflict, and were stationed in a designated war zone as follows:

- Campaign medals, as defined by the DOD, are medals which recognize service members who are deployed to the geographic area where the combat is actually occurring.
- Members awarded campaign medals have the highest degree of personal risk and hardship as they are conducting the combat operations and are deployed to the area where the combat is actually occurring.
- Expeditionary medals, as defined by the DOD, are medals which recognize deployed participation in small scale and/or short-duration combat operations or military operations where there is an imminent threat of hostilities:
 - Expeditionary medals are also awarded to members deployed in support of combat operations, but who are not in the geographic area where the actual combat is occurring.
 - Expeditionary medals are associated with high levels of personal risk and hardship.

During 2020 the Select Committee on Pension Policy (SCPP) and Law Enforcement Officers' and Firefighters' Plan 2 Retirement Board (LEOFF 2 Board) were directed to study and make recommendations to the Legislature regarding expanding no-cost military service credit for interruptive service to members who were awarded an expeditionary medal.

Summary of Bill:

The definition of veteran 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 medal was awarded.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 18, 2022.

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