

FINAL BILL REPORT

2SHB 2014

C 146 L 24
Synopsis as Enacted

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

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by 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).

House Committee on Innovation, Community & Economic Development, & Veterans
House Committee on Appropriations
Senate Committee on State Government & Elections
Senate Committee on Ways & Means

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);
- 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;

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- special designated license plates;
- property tax relief from the veterans' widow and widower property tax exemption grant; and
- tuition waivers or reductions.

In addition, the state-sponsored retirement systems provide service credit to veterans who meet certain criteria.

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:

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 solely 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 unless the statements, conducts, or acts are or were prohibited by the Uniform Code of Military Justice on grounds other than the person's 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.

To prove a "qualifying discharge," an individual must provide official documentation that shows the following to the agency administering the sought benefit or protection:

- the individual's characterization of service; and
- if an individual has a "qualifying discharge," the individual's reason for discharge or narrative reason for separation.

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.

Miscellaneous.

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

Votes on Final Passage:

House 97 0

Senate 49 0

Effective: June 6, 2024

April 1, 2025 (Sections 25-27)