

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2415

As Reported by House Committee On:

State Government

Title: An act relating to defining veteran for certain purposes.

Brief Description: Defining veteran for certain purposes.

Sponsors: Representatives Haigh, Talcott, Wallace, Armstrong, Fromhold, Anderson, Upthegrove, Simpson, G., Morrell, Conway and Rockefeller.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government: 1/22/04 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Expands the definition of veteran to include merchant mariners who served aboard an oceangoing vessel operated by the Department of Defense from June 25, 1950, through July 27, 1953, in Korean territorial waters, or from August 5, 1964, through May 7, 1975, in Vietnam territorial waters.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Haigh, Chair; Miloscia, Vice Chair; Armstrong, Ranking Minority Member; Shabro, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Hunt, McDermott, Nixon, Tom and Wallace.

Staff: Marsha Reilly (786-7135).

Background:

The definition of veteran is used throughout statute as an eligibility requirement for various benefits, including retirement service credit; admission to the soldiers' and veterans' homes; veterans' scoring preference on civil service exams; free license plates for disabled veterans and prisoners of war; county aid to indigent veterans and families; restrictions on sending veterans or their families to almshouses; and county burial of indigent deceased veterans.

For purposes of these benefits, veteran is defined as a person who has received an honorable discharge or received a discharge for physical reasons with an honorable record and one who has served in at least one of the following capacities:

- as a member in any branch of the armed forces, including the national guard and armed forces reserves;
- as a member of the women's air forces service pilots;
- as a member of the armed forces reserves, national guard, or coast guard and called into service for at least 180 cumulative days;
- as a civil service crew member aboard a U.S. army or naval transport service vessel in oceangoing service from December 7, 1941, through December 31, 1946; and
- as a member of the Philippine armed forces/scouts from December 7, 1941, through August 15, 1945.

Summary of Bill:

The definition of veteran is expanded to include a U.S. documented merchant mariner with service aboard an oceangoing vessel operated by the Department of Defense, or its agents, during the following periods:

- June 25, 1950, through July 27, 1953, in Korean territorial waters; or
- August 5, 1964 through May 7, 1975, in Vietnam territorial waters.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 19, 2004.

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

Testimony For: This is not about money or benefits, it is about recognition of merchant mariners who served during these two conflicts. Merchant Marines put their lives on the line. They have been shot at and have been in harms way. During the Vietnam War, they were exposed to Agent Orange. Yet they are not veterans. This is not a big budget issue. The major benefit would be admittance to soldiers homes. It took 40 years to recognize merchant marines who served during World War II. It should not take another 40 years to recognize those who served during the Korean and Vietnam wars.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: Ron Springer, American Merchant Marines Veterans; and Don Smith, Veterans Legislative Coalition.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.