

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5245

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
State Government, February 8, 2017

Title: An act relating to defining veteran for the purpose of receiving certain benefits.

Brief Description: Defining veteran for the purpose of receiving certain benefits.

Sponsors: Senators Hobbs, Bailey and Fortunato.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: State Government: 1/27/17, 2/08/17 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Expands eligibility for certain state benefits for veterans who received a form DD-214 or similar document characterizing service as honorable.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5245 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Miloscia, Chair; Zeiger, Vice Chair; Hunt, Ranking Minority Member; Kuderer and Pearson.

Staff: Samuel Brown (786-7470)

Background: Washington agencies offer a variety of benefits to military veterans some of which are described below.

Armed Forces Decals and Veteran License Plates. The Department of Licensing (DOL) issues armed forces decals indicating military status at no additional cost to active duty service members, disabled veterans, military reservists, military retirees, and qualifying veterans at no additional cost with the purchase of special armed forces license plates. DOL also provides disabled veteran and former prisoner of war license plates to qualifying veterans at no cost.

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.

Veterans' Homes. The Washington Department of Veterans' Affairs operates four veterans' homes, open to eligible veterans:

- the Washington Soldiers' Home and Colony in Orting;
- the Washington Veterans' Home in Retsil;
- the Spokane Veterans' Home; and
- the Walla Walla Veterans' Home.

Veterans' Preference in Civil Service. Competitive examinations for public employment or at private companies or agencies contracting with the state are on a 100-point scale. An eligible veteran receives an added percentage to their score based on the veteran's status. A veteran who served during a period of war or armed conflict and does not receive military retirement is eligible for a 10 percent increase. A veteran who did not serve during a period of war but is receiving military retirement benefits is eligible for a 5 percent increase. A veteran who is called to active military service from employment with the state is eligible for a 5 percent increase until the first promotion.

Down Payment Assistance. The Housing Finance Commission provides a program to assist eligible veterans with making the down payment and paying closing costs on the purchase of a first home or a home in a targeted area. Recipients must not exceed a localized maximum income and are eligible for a maximum loan of \$10,000.

Definition of Veteran. Statute sets forth the requirements to qualify for these veterans' benefits. A recipient must have fulfilled their service obligations and received an honorable or medical discharge, serving in at least one of the following capacities:

- As a member of any branch of the United States military, including the National Guard or reserves;
- As a member of the Women's Air Force Service Pilots;
- As a member of the reserves, National Guard, or Coast Guard who was called into federal service for at least 180 days;
- As a civil service crewmember aboard a transport service vessel during World War II;
- As a member of the Philippine armed forces/scouts during World War II; or
- As a merchant marine aboard a Department of Defense operated vessel during the Korean or Vietnam War who received a military commendation.

Summary of Bill: The bill as referred to committee not considered.

Summary of Bill (First Substitute): A veteran who received a form DD-214, or equivalent or successor paperwork, characterizing their service as honorable meets the definition of veteran for receiving the above-referenced state benefits.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on First Substitute: PRO: This bill will give transitioning service members still on active duty a leg up. A service member on terminal leave cannot use veteran status until they've actually separated from the military. This preserves the nature and character of the veteran requirements while making a significant impact on the futures of veterans applying for public service jobs. It distinguishes the functional end of military service from the formal end.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Steve Hobbs, Prime Sponsor; Joshua Dugan, Snohomish County Government.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.