

SENATE BILL REPORT

2SHB 2014

As Passed Senate, March 1, 2024

Title: An act relating to the definition of veteran and restoring honor to veterans.

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).

Brief History: Passed House: 2/10/24, 97-0.

Committee Activity: State Government & Elections: 2/20/24 [DP-WM].

Ways & Means: 2/24/24, 2/26/24 [DP].

Floor Activity: Passed Senate: 3/1/24, 49-0.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Expands veterans' eligibility for purposes of state benefits and services for veterans.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Hunt, Chair; Valdez, Vice Chair; Wilson, J., Ranking Member; Dozier, Fortunato, Hasegawa and Kuderer.

Staff: Greg Vogel (786-7413)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: Do pass.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Signed by Senators Robinson, Chair; Mullet, Vice Chair, Capital; Nguyen, Vice Chair, Operating; Wilson, L., Ranking Member, Operating; Gildon, Assistant Ranking Member, Operating; Schoesler, Ranking Member, Capital; Rivers, Assistant Ranking Member, Capital; Billig, Boehnke, Braun, Conway, Dhingra, Hasegawa, Hunt, Keiser, Muzzall, Pedersen, Randall, Saldaña, Torres, Van De Wege, Wagoner and Wellman.

Staff: Maria Hovde (786-7474)

Background: The state provides various services and benefits for veterans, including:

- admission to state soldiers' and veterans' homes;
- hiring preference and scoring preference on civil service exams;
- special license plates;
- veteran homeownership down payment assistance programs;
- renewal and extension of licenses; and
- services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

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:

- higher scoring preference on civil service exams;
- participation in a designated shared leave pool program;
- special designated license plates;
- property tax relief for senior widows and widowers of veterans; and
- tuition waivers, reductions, and other education benefits.

The state-sponsored retirement systems provide credit to combat veterans for interruptive military service for up to five years of service.

In order to be eligible for state veterans' benefits and programs, veterans generally must have received an honorable discharge or other excusable discharge.

Summary of Bill: Veterans' eligibility for state veterans' programs and benefits is expanded to include any veteran who has received:

- 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:
 1. a person's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression;
 2. 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

3. the disclosure of statements, conduct, or acts relating to sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression to military officials.

The Department of Veterans Affairs must develop and implement an outreach program to ensure eligible veterans are aware of state veterans' benefits and programs.

Appropriation: The bill contains a null and void clause requiring specific funding be provided in an omnibus appropriation act.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Effective Date: The bill contains several effective dates. Please refer to the bill.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (State Government & Elections): No public hearing was held.

Persons Testifying (State Government & Elections): N/A

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (State Government & Elections): N/A

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means): PRO: Investing in veterans and families is an investment in our state and communities. This bill creates stability for veterans and their families by expanding benefits for these individuals. Tuition exemption is a program that has an incredible return on investment. Individuals with a higher education have median income that is 60 percent higher than those with a high school degree and these individuals are less likely to be homeless or unemployed.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Nathan Olson, Attorney General's Office.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means): No one.