

SUBJECT: Exempting certain military personnel from the hunter education program

COMMITTEE: Culture, Recreation, and Tourism — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 6 ayes — Hilderbran, Kuempel, Homer, D. Howard, O'Day, Phillips
0 nays
1 absent — Dukes

WITNESSES: None

BACKGROUND: Parks and Wildlife Code, sec. 62.014 requires hunters, including out-of-state hunters, who were born on or after September 2, 1971, to complete successfully a hunter education course. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission, by rule, has set the minimum age of hunter certification at 12 years and the cost at \$15. A person over age 17 who does not complete the hunter education course must purchase a "Hunter Education Deferral" at \$10, in addition to a hunting license, and be accompanied. A deferral may be obtained only once and is valid only until the end of the current license year. "Accompanied" means by a person who is at least 17, is licensed to hunt in Texas, has passed the hunter education course or is exempt by age, and is within normal voice control.

In 2005, the 79th Legislature enacted HB 1076 by Crabb et al., which amended Parks and Wildlife Code sec. 42.012(b) and sec. 46.004(c) to require the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) to waive hunting and fishing license fees for active duty U.S. military personnel.

DIGEST: CSHB 152 would amend sec. 62.014 to exempt a member of the U.S. military serving on active duty from the required hunter education program.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2007.

SUPPORTERS SAY: CSHB 152 would exempt our active military personnel from the required hunter education program without compromising public safety. Active members of the U.S. military are trained extensively on guns and

weapons. Some military personnel operate firearms on a daily basis. We rely on our military to protect the lives of others. That trust should extend to their ability to operate firearms for recreational hunting without having to take a required hunter education program.

Participating in hunter education is unnecessary and inconvenient for active members of the military in order to hunt in Texas. When on leave, an active member usually has a limited amount of time before having to report back for duty. While military personnel could have time to hunt within a few days of leave, they would not likely have time beforehand to complete a hunter education program. In addition, requiring our military residents or visitors to obtain the specified deferral and be accompanied by another Texas-licensed hunter of certain qualifications would seem impractical given time limitations.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

The hunter education program teaches more about proper hunting than just firearm usage. The program instructs as well on hunting regulations, wildlife management and identification, conservation, ethics, and outdoor skills. These regulations and skills are not necessarily learned in the military. For the protection of other people and wildlife, the state has a responsibility to educate properly those persons who want to hunt.

NOTES:

During the 2005 regular session, a similar bill, HB 552 by Phillips, was placed on the General Calendar, but the House took no further action.