

SUBJECT: Relating to hunting and fishing license fee exemptions for certain veterans

COMMITTEE: Defense and Veterans' Affairs — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 7 ayes — Menéndez, R. Sheffield, Collier, Farias, R. Miller, Schaefer, Zedler

1 nay — Frank

1 absent — Moody

WITNESSES: For — None

Against — None

On — David Sinclair, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

BACKGROUND: The Veterans Administration defines a disabled veteran as a person with a service-connected disability that consists of the loss of the use of a foot or leg, or a disability rating of 60 percent or more, and who is receiving compensation from the federal government for the disability.

DIGEST: HB 1368 would amend Parks and Wildlife Code, sec. 42.012, by adding veterans who, through a service-connected disability, had lost the use of an upper extremity to the list of veterans who were exempt from paying a fee for a resident hunting license.

The bill also would require the Parks and Wildlife Department to waive for disabled veterans who reside outside of Texas the fee for a combination hunting and fishing license.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2013.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 1368 would be a way for Texas to show its gratitude to all disabled veterans, including those who live out of state, by waiving fees for hunting and fishing licenses. This would be an effective way to honor those who have sacrificed so much for this country and would encourage more tourism from wounded warrior groups.

The bill also would expand the definition of a disabled veteran so that more former service-members could stay active. These outdoor activities are a popular form of therapy for disabled veterans, and other states already offer exemptions to bolster their tourism industry. Waiving the fees would not pose a significant fiscal impact to the state, according to the Legislative Budget Board.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

Although honoring disabled veterans is important, exempting out-of-state residents from hunting and fishing license fees would deny Texas revenue it could apply toward services performed by the Parks and Wildlife Department to create and maintain recreation opportunities for all Texans.