

- SUBJECT:** Allowing extra leave for certain veterans returning to state employment
- COMMITTEE:** Defense and Veterans' Affairs — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 4 ayes — S. King, Aycock, Blanco, Farias
- 3 nays — Frank, Schaefer, Shaheen
- WITNESSES:** For — Ray Lindner, National Guard Association of Texas; Morgan Little, Texas Coalition of Veteran Organizations; Jim Brennan, Texas Coalition of Veterans Organizations (*Registered, but did not testify*: Melinda Smith, Combined Law Enforcement Associations of Texas; Harrison Hiner, Texas State Employees Union)
- Against — None
- On — Perry Jefferies, Texas A&M Health Science Center; Kyle Mitchell, Texas Veterans Commission; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Amanda Arriaga, Robert Bodisch, Norma Cortez, and Greg Davis, Department of Public Safety; Jeff Williford, Texas Veterans Commission)
- BACKGROUND:** Government Code, ch. 661 contains provisions related to leave for state officers and employees, including the granting of emergency and other types of leave.
- Sec. 437.204 contains provisions regarding the reemployment of a state military forces service member called to training or duty.
- DIGEST:** HB 339 would provide for leave to be granted to a state employee who was reemployed after military service to tend to matters related to the veteran's military service or reintegration into civilian life. These would include obtaining medical or mental health care and receiving employee assistance counseling. The bill would limit to 15 days the leave that could be granted per fiscal year without any deduction in salary or loss of other benefits such as vacation or sick leave.

The bill also would allow the administrative head of a state agency to annually grant additional days of leave for the purposes above as deemed appropriate for the employee.

HB 339 would take effect on September 1, 2015.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 339 would help smooth the transition for veterans returning to employment with the state after a deployment. Veterans have many needs when they return from a deployment and may have physical disabilities, other physical or mental health issues, or financial concerns to address as they reintegrate into civilian life.

The bill would put into statute a recommendation of the Texas Coordinating Council for Veterans Services that the leave component of the Texas Department of Public Safety's veteran assistance program be implemented for all state agencies.

The bill would encourage, but not require, state employers to provide additional relief to veterans who needed it. By clearly stating in statute that this leave was permitted pending agency approval, the bill would prompt more state agencies to provide these benefits to returning veterans who have sacrificed so much for the state and the nation.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

State agencies already have the flexibility to grant this type of leave and there should be no need to pass a law accomplish it. The bill would not explicitly add to veterans' existing benefits.

**OTHER
OPPONENTS
SAY:**

Veterans already receive ample benefits and there is no need to extend them further. Too many veterans taking off additional time also could adversely impact the workforce.