

SUBJECT: Waiving occupational license, exam fees for certain military and spouses

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

VOTE: 7 ayes — S. King, Frank, Aycock, Blanco, Farias, Schaefer, Shaheen

0 nays

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 14 — 31-0

WITNESSES: (*On House companion bill, HB 2012*)

For — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Traci Berry, Goodwill Central Texas; Lori Henning, Texas Association of Goodwills; Jim Brennan, Morgan Little, and John A. Miterko, Texas Coalition of Veterans Organizations; Jeffrey Brooks, Texas Conservative Coalition)

Against — None

On — Randy Nesbitt, Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Stan Kurtz, Texas Veterans Commission; Carol E. Miller, Department of State Health Services-Professional Licensing and Certification Unit)

BACKGROUND: Occupations Code, sec. 55.007 requires state agencies that issue licenses to give credit to military service members and veterans for military service, training, or education toward meeting licensing requirements.

Currently, the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation accepts applications for occupational licenses for six occupations from members of the military or veterans who wish to receive credit for their military experience, service, training, or education to meet licensing requirements. This includes licenses for:

- air conditioning and refrigeration contractors and technicians;
- barbers;
- electricians, including master electricians and journeyman

- electricians;
- polygraph examiners;
- registered accessibility specialists; and
- water well drillers and pump installers.

DIGEST: SB 807 would require any state agency that issued licenses to waive the license application and examination fees paid to the state for certain military members, veterans, and their spouses.

The fee waivers would apply to military service members or veterans whose service, training, or education substantially met all the requirements for the license or to service members, veterans, or military spouses who hold a current license issued by another jurisdiction for which the licensing requirements are substantially equivalent to those in Texas.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2015, and would apply only to an application for an occupational license filed on or after that date.

SUPPORTERS SAY: SB 807 would help veterans transitioning from active duty to more quickly obtain occupational licenses and secure employment by removing the barrier of having to pay fees to the state for the license. The bill also would help veterans and their spouses obtain occupational licenses if they already had a license from another jurisdiction that met Texas' occupational licensing requirements.

The bill would be sufficiently narrow because only fees paid to the state would be waived. SB 807 would not affect the ability of third-party administrators of exams to collect their fees.

State agencies already are required to give military members and veterans credit for their service, training, or education toward meeting licensing and apprenticeship requirements but are not required to waive state fees or examinations. Waiving state fees under this bill would further the intent of what agencies are already required to do under current law to assist veterans seeking occupational licenses in obtaining employment. In

practice, the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation already waives some fees for military spouses who apply for a Texas occupational license when they hold similar licenses in other jurisdictions with similar licensing requirements.

Although fees paid for occupational licenses are used to cover all programs provided for that occupation, the decrease in fees would be so small that any revenue loss would be negligible. The bill would apply only to a small number of people and would not cost the state enough revenue that fees for others would have to be raised.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

There is a chance SB 807 could increase costs for individuals receiving occupational licenses who still had to pay the required fees. Because the fees collected from each license must cover all programming provided for that occupation, waiving fees for certain individuals under this bill could lead to raising the fee for those who still had to pay in order to cover the cost of licensing programs, such as continuing education courses.

NOTES:

The Legislative Budget Board's fiscal note states that according to the comptroller, the bill would reduce state revenue from occupational licensing and exam fees, but sufficient data does not exist to determine how much revenue would be forgone.

The House companion bill, HB 2012 by Sheets, was placed on the May 12 General State Calendar but was not considered.