

SUBJECT: Allowing a student's visit to a military recruiter to be an excused absence

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 11 ayes — Huberty, Bernal, Allen, Bohac, Deshotel, Dutton, Gooden,
K. King, Koop, Meyer, VanDeaver

0 nays

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Mike Motheral, Small Rural School Finance Coalition; Dwight Harris and Ted Melina Raab, Texas AFT (American Federation of Teachers); Courtney Boswell and Houston Tower, Texas Aspires; Miranda Goodsheller, Texas Association of Business; Barry Haenisch, Texas Association of Community Schools; Amy Beneski, Texas Association of School Administrators; Mark Terry, Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association; Ellen Arnold, Texas PTA; Colby Nichols, Texas Rural Education Association; Portia Bosse, Texas State Teachers Association; Kimberly Saldivar)

Against — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Katija Gruene, Green Party of Texas; Jaime Puente, Texas Graduate Student Diversity)

On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Von Byer and Eric Marin, Texas Education Agency)

DIGEST: HB 1270 would allow a school district to consider a student's visit to a military recruitment center an excused absence for the purpose of determining the student's interest in enlisting in a branch of the U.S. armed forces. The bill would allow the district to excuse a junior or senior in high school for up to two days per school year for this purpose. The district would adopt a policy to determine when an absence would be excused and a procedure to verify the student's visit to the recruitment center.

This bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take

effect September 1, 2017, and would apply beginning with the 2017-18 school year.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 1270 would allow high school students to explore careers in the military without being penalized with an unexcused absence. A visit to a military recruitment center can be an important step in making a major life choice, and the bill reasonably would allow school districts to excuse up to two absences per year for this purpose.

Not all students will enter college after high school, and districts should accommodate students exploring other options in the same way they accommodate those bound for college. Campus visits may be considered excused absences, and visits to military recruitment centers should be treated no differently.

Students in rural areas often must drive long distances and miss school to visit a recruitment center during normal business hours. Since it is not possible in some cases to avoid missing a half day or full day of school to visit a military recruitment center, districts should allow these visits to be excused.

A junior or senior visiting a military recruitment center is making a voluntary choice to gain more information about a possible option after high school. In excusing a high school student's absence for this purpose, the school district would not be encouraging a particular choice — it simply would be allowing students to make their own decisions without penalizing them.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

Texas public schools should not facilitate efforts of military recruiters in targeting teenagers, especially low-income students who may view military service as a way out of poverty without a full understanding of the effect several years of enlistment could have on their lives.

NOTES:

A companion bill, SB 614 by Seliger, was referred to the Senate Committee on Veteran Affairs and Border Security on February 13.