

SUBJECT: Expanding eligibility for Veterans' Land Board benefits and programs

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

VOTE: 7 ayes — Gutierrez, Blanco, Arévalo, Cain, Flynn, Lambert, Wilson

0 nays

WITNESSES: For — None

Against — None

On — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Matthew Elledge, Texas Veterans' Land Board)

BACKGROUND: The Texas Veterans' Land Board (VLB) administers five programs for eligible veterans: the Texas State Veterans Homes Program, the Texas State Veterans Cemetery Program, and three long-term, low-interest loan programs to help veterans purchase land or a home or fund home-improvement projects.

Natural Resources Code, sec. 161.001 defines a veteran for the purposes of eligibility for VLB benefits as a person who meets certain residency requirements and:

- served at least 90 days on active duty in and has not been dishonorably discharged from the U.S. Armed Forces;
- has at least 20 years of active or reserve federal military service;
- has completed all initial active duty training as a member of the Texas National Guard; or
- served in the armed forces of the Republic of Vietnam between February 28, 1961, and May 7, 1975.

DIGEST: HB 206 would expand the definition of "veteran" for the purposes of eligibility for Veterans' Land Board benefits to include an individual who

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had at least 15 years of active or reserve state military service as a member of the Texas State Guard.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2017.

**SUPPORTERS SAY:** HB 206 would address concerns that members of the Texas State Guard are ineligible to receive Veterans' Land Board (VLB) benefits despite their service to Texas. When called upon, the Texas State Guard assists state and local authorities during emergencies and disaster relief operations, conducts homeland security activities, and provides other community support functions. This bill would honor guard members with long-term service to the state by making them eligible for VLB benefits, including access to land and home loan programs, veterans' homes, and veterans' cemetery plots.

**OPPONENTS SAY:** No apparent opposition.