

SUBJECT: Issuing specialty license plates to surviving spouses of certain veterans

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

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

0 nays

WITNESSES: For — Donald Hallager; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Jim Brennan, Texas Coalition of Veterans Organizations)

Against — None

On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Jeremiah Kuntz, Texas Department of Motor Vehicles)

BACKGROUND: Transportation Code, sec. 504.302 allows the surviving spouse of a military veteran who was eligible and registered for a specialty license plate to continue to register one vehicle under the applicable section as long as the spouse remains unmarried.

Sec. 504.3015 requires that the registration fee be waived for one set of license plates issued to a military veteran eligible for a Distinguished Flying Cross medal specialty plate, a Defense Superior Service Medal specialty plate, or most specialty plates for extraordinary service.

DIGEST: HB 377 would allow the surviving spouse of a military veteran who would be eligible for certain specialty license plates to register one vehicle for the applicable specialty plate as long as the spouse remains unmarried. The bill would apply only to the surviving spouse of a military veteran who was eligible for:

- a Distinguished Flying Cross medal specialty plate;
- a World War II Veteran specialty plate;
- certain specialty plates for extraordinary military service;

- a Legion of Merit medal specialty plate; or
- a Defense Superior Service Medal specialty plate.

To apply for a plate, the surviving spouse would have to submit proof of the deceased spouse's eligibility for the specialty license plate.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2017.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 377 would honor the sacrifices veterans and their families have made by closing a gap in statute that prevents surviving spouses of certain decorated veterans from applying for a specialty license plate after the death of a spouse. Currently, a surviving spouse may continue to register only a license plate for which the veteran had registered before death. World War II veterans and those who earned a Distinguished Flying Cross medal, a Legion of Merit medal, recognition for extraordinary military service, or a Defense Superior Service Medal made sacrifices that were shared by their families. By allowing a surviving spouse to apply for a specialty plate for which the deceased veteran would be eligible, the bill would give recognition to families who have collectively earned it.

Texas attracts many out-of-state military families, including surviving spouses. Closing the gap in current law would support these families and give all surviving spouses of some of the most decorated veterans equal opportunity to honor their loved ones.

Access to a specialty plate also could alleviate a financial burden for certain surviving spouses. The surviving spouse of a military veteran eligible for a Distinguished Flying Cross medal specialty plate, a Defense Superior Service Medal specialty plate, or most specialty plates for extraordinary service would be exempt from the applicable registration fees.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

No apparent opposition.