

SUBJECT: Allowing Texas veterans to hunt or fish for one day without a license

COMMITTEE: Culture, Recreation and Tourism — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 9 ayes — K. King, Gervin-Hawkins, Burns, Clardy, Frullo, Israel, Krause, Martinez, C. Morales

0 nays

WITNESSES: For — Blake Siebrecht, Brothers-Sisters Of Our Military Adventures (BOOM Adventures); (*Registered, but did not testify:* Anna Alkire; Beth Maynard; Ruth York)

Against — None

On — Justin Halverson, Texas Parks and Wildlife

BACKGROUND: Parks and Wildlife Code chs. 42 and 46 govern general hunting licenses and fishing licenses, respectively. The chapters establish the requirements to obtain a license and contain provisions for issuing licenses to Texas residents and nonresidents. The chapters also set the required fees necessary to obtain a license.

DIGEST: HB 1728 would authorize the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) to select and cooperate with one or more nonprofits that exclusively served veterans of the United States armed forces to promote hunting and fishing by those veterans. A selection of a nonprofit would have to be approved by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission. A veteran who was a resident of this state and who was served by a selected nonprofit would be authorized to hunt or fish on one day without holding the required license if accompanied by a representative of the nonprofit who holds the appropriate license. Such a veteran would not be required to hold a hunting or fishing license if acting in accordance with the provisions of the bill.

The commission would be required to adopt rules establishing criteria

under which TPWD could select a nonprofit partner under this section and guidelines under which a representative of or a veteran served by a nonprofit would be authorized to engage in hunting or fishing activities under the provisions of the bill.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2021.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 1728 would allow nonprofits exclusively dedicated to assisting veterans to better accomplish their mission by removing the costly burden of obtaining a license for one-day hunting or fishing trips for veterans who are accompanied by a representative of the nonprofit who holds the appropriate license. Veterans often struggle to adjust to civilian life and face higher rates of suicide and mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder. The high number of veterans living in Texas makes this a particularly important issue for the state. Some veteran-serving nonprofit organizations have found success in outreach efforts by introducing veterans to hunting and fishing and pairing them with individuals who can empathize with their experiences.

Under current law, a veteran who accompanies a nonprofit license holder on a one-day hunting or fishing trip is required to obtain a license. While these nonprofits typically pay the cost of the activity itself, the veteran is often required to pay the fee to obtain the license. This cost can make the activity prohibitive for some veterans. Introducing veterans to new activities and allies they can empathize with can be an important part of veterans outreach. In some cases, it can be a life-changing or even lifesaving experience. Veterans should not miss out on this platform to receive needed help because they cannot afford a license.

Allowing the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) to partner with certain nonprofits would not present a significant cost to the state and the bill would not create a mandate to partner with nonprofits. The rulemaking authority granted under the bill would give the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission the necessary authority to ensure that the partnership program functioned as intended. The bill would grant no permanent authorization to hunt or fish. After a veteran's one-day trip, any

further hunting or fishing by the veteran would require a license.

Texas has a large veteran population, and the bill appropriately focuses on allowing nonprofits to help serve their needs. Other states would be free to follow Texas' example and enable their own veteran populations to enjoy the rewarding outdoor experiences that hunting and fishing can provide.

**CRITICS
SAY:**

The partnership program created by the bill could be adapted to serve all U.S. veterans by allowing veterans who are not residents of Texas to hunt or fish for one day with a Texas license holder.