

Date of Hearing: April 29, 2014

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS  
Sharon Quirk-Silva, Chair  
AB 1637 (Frazier and Bloom) – As Introduced: February 11, 2014

SUBJECT: Driver's licenses: veteran designation.

SUMMARY: [As proposed to be amended in Committee] Allows an applicant for a driver's license (DL) or identification card (ID) to request the DL or ID be printed with the word "VETERAN." The California Department of Motor Vehicles (department) would be required to print the word "VETERAN" on the face of a driver's license or identification card as specified. Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Requires the department to modify the DL application for an original, duplicate or in-person renewal DL or ID so that the application allows an applicant to request the word "VETERAN" be printed on the face of the DL or ID.
- 2) Directs that a form will be developed by the California Department of Veterans Affairs and the department to acknowledge verification of veteran status. A County Veterans Service Office (CVSO) will verify the veteran's status as a veteran, sign the form, and return it to the veteran. The department will accept this signed form as proof of veteran status.
- 3) Directs the department to, upon payment of any required departmental fee, print the word "VETERAN" on the face of a DL or ID in a location determined by the department issued to a person who makes this request and presents the verification to the department.
- 4) Mandates that the department may charge a fee in the amount of \_\_\_\_ dollars (\$\_\_\_\_) to any person who requests, that the person's DL or ID be printed with the word "VETERAN".

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Requires a DL issued by DMV to state the class of license for which the licensee has qualified and to contain the distinguishing number assigned to the applicant, the date of expiration, the true full name, age, and mailing address of the licensee, a brief description and engraved picture or photograph of the licensee for the purpose of identification, and space for the signature of the licensee.
- 2) Specifies the contents of a DL and requires the application for a DL or ID to contain a space for an applicant to indicate whether they have served in the armed forces and to give their consent to be contacted regarding eligibility to receive state or federal veteran benefits.
- 3) Requires the department to collect specific information and electronically transmit to the Department of Veterans Affairs each relevant applicant's true full name and mailing address.
- 4) Allows this specified information to be used by the Department of Veterans Affairs for the purpose of assisting individuals to access veterans' benefits and prohibits its dissemination except as needed for that purpose.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: Active Duty and Reserve veterans have a Military ID card to show their status. Similarly those who have retired from service also have a similar lifetime ID. Many veterans who are receiving services through the United States Department of Veterans Affairs Health Administration have an ID from that Administration. However many veterans fall into none of the foregoing categories. For example, a Marine who served three tours in Afghanistan and left the service after 12 years to pursue civilian opportunities could very likely have no ID to prove his veterans status. For servicemembers like that, the only method of proving service is by showing a DD 214.

Upon leaving active service and upon discharge or separation from service, servicemembers are issued a discharge document, a DD-214. The DD214 has a substantial amount of personal information on it, is paper. For these and a variety of other reasons, it is not practical for servicemembers to carry a DD 214 with them. This is particularly true for homeless veterans.

The bill is drafted so that verification of veteran status happens at the office of the County Veteran Service Officer (CVSO). This of course lowers the work burden on DMW, but has the additional important effect of increasing veteran traffic to the CVSOs. CVSOs can then facilitate connecting veterans to all federal, state, and local benefits to which the veteran may be entitled.

According to the author: Having the veteran's designation would, "...be helpful to medical and law enforcement agencies. This designation would ensure that these entities are informed and therefore better equipped to handle medical and law enforcement situations – for example, a situation involving a veteran with some sort of trauma, such as posttraumatic stress disorder as a result of their service." This function of the proposed designation is supported by a letter from The California Police Chief's Association, Inc. That Association stated in support of this bill, "Community policing is a fact in today's law enforcement culture, knowing when a veteran is in front of a police officer can and does result in better outcomes and improved community relations."

Federal, state, and local governments offer varying degrees of benefits and services for veterans. In the past, the DD-214 sufficed for veterans' relatively infrequent experiences with the federal Veterans Affairs system. However, in the last decade, numerous private, non-profit service providers have begun to offer a variety of services for veterans, including; housing, mental health, drug counseling, and financial, educational, and occupational assistance. According to a *San Diego Union Tribune* article, "California veterans may be losing out on \$400 million in federal benefits." Driving additional traffic to the CVSOs is very likely to result in increased benefits being paid to California veterans.

Veterans groups also point out that as large numbers of service members return from overseas deployments, they desire an efficient means of proving their eligibility for benefits and discounts (such as those available from Home Depot or Jiffy Lube).

In consideration of these potential advantages, 40 states currently offer veterans designation on DL's with several additional states considering pending legislation. Previous versions of this bill have led to ongoing discussions with DMV related to establishing the appropriate fee cover the cost associated with the proposed veteran designation. The author's office has indicated that discussions will continue with DMV to identify the proper fee to be included in this bill.

Previous legislation:

AB 531 (Frazier) required the department to offer a DL or ID printed with the word "VETERAN" indicating the licensee or possessor of an identification card is a military veteran. That bill was held on suspense in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 1725 (Lowenthal) required the department to offer a DL with a symbol indicating the licensee is a military veteran, such as the letter "V", or some other appropriate form of designation. That bill was held on suspense in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

American Legion (co-sponsor)  
AMVETS (co-sponsor)  
American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), AFL-CIO  
Association for Los Angeles Deputy Sheriffs  
California Association of County Veteran Service Officers (co-sponsor)  
California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (co-sponsor)  
California Labor Federation  
California-Nevada Conference of Operating Engineers  
California Professional Firefighters  
California State Commanders Veterans Council (co-sponsor)  
California Police Chiefs Association  
Contra Costa County  
County of Los Angeles  
Delta Veterans Group  
Los Angeles County Probation Officers Union  
Los Angeles Police Protective League  
Military Officers Association of America, California Council of Chapters (co-sponsor)  
Plumas County  
Riverside Sheriff's Association  
Solano County  
Town of Danville  
Veterans Caucus of the California Democratic Party  
Veterans Employment Committee of Contra Costa County  
Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of California (co-sponsor)  
Vietnam Veterans of America, California State Council (co-sponsor)  
Vietnam Veterans of Diablo County

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