

Date of Hearing: April 2, 2013

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
Al Muratsuchi, Chair
AB 258 (Chávez) – As Introduced: February 7, 2013

SUBJECT: State agencies: veterans.

SUMMARY: This bill changes the wording of how the state asks those with whom it interacts about their military or veteran status. Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Mandates that every state agency that inquires whether a person is a veteran must request that information only in the following format: “Have you ever served in the military?”
- 2) Specifies that this section shall apply only to a written form or written publication that is newly printed on or after January 1, 2014.

EXISTING LAW: Does not specify the form of this kind of inquiry.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown at this time.

COMMENTS: In 2011, the most recent data available from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA), California veterans received an average compensation and pension amount of \$1,929. This was less than the national average of \$2,104 dollars. Increasing the participation rate for California veterans would benefit the veterans and the economy of the State.

According to the author when residents are asked if they are a veteran many will incorrectly answer in the negative:

Currently California residents are simply asked, “Are you a veteran?” Although a very simple question, many veterans believe they are not true veterans because they have never served in combat or, most commonly, because they are women. In 2011 the California Research Bureau conducted a survey on women, 63 of the 843 respondents (7.4%), marked that they were not a veteran then included comments such as, “I served in the Air Force,” additionally the women stated “I thought veteran benefits were only for men.”

Furthermore, when the CRB held the ICV (Interagency Council on Veterans) meetings in December 2011, and Jan. and Feb. 2012 both women in the services repeatedly stated that the, “Are you a veteran?” question was insufficient for identifying female veterans and men who had not served in combat.

Veterans who do not identify themselves can lose out on many Federal Benefits for which they are entitled. Such benefits include the GI Bill, disability compensation and pension, access to free or reduced cost medical care, vocational rehab, unemployment benefits, veteran home loans, burial benefits, and survivor benefits.

The bill seeks a small change which will increase veterans' participation in benefits and services they have earned, aiding them and the economy. Further, it provides a reasonable phase-in period to allow time for changes in digital and printed materials without waste or creating a crisis. Finally, for all veterans, but with particular respect to female veterans, as stated by the author:

“It is a shame that many of our female veterans do not believe they are entitled to the same benefits as their male counterparts. AB 258 is a small change that will positively impact our female veterans and ensure they have access to the benefits they deserve.”

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

American Association of University Women- California
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO

Opposition

None on file.

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