Date of Hearing: March 26, 2019

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
Jacqui Irwin, Chair
AB 21 (Obernolte) – As Amended February 26, 2019

SUBJECT: Driver's licenses: veteran designation

SUMMARY: Removes the one-time $5 fee to a person applying for a driver's license or identification card with a veteran designation after July 1, 2020.

EXISTING LAW:

1) Requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (DMV) to develop a verification form in consultation with the Department of Motor Vehicles and the California Association of County Veteran's Service Officers (CVSOs). A CVSO verifies a person's veteran status and signs the verification form, and DMV then accepts the signed verification form as proof of an applicant's veteran status.

2) Upon payment of a fee and verification of an applicant's veteran status, requires DMV to print the word "veteran" on the face of a driver's license or identification card.

3) Requires DMV to charge a one-time additional fee of $5 to a person applying for a driver's license or identification card with a veteran designation and authorizes DMV to increase the fee to not more than $15 to cover its reasonable costs.

4) Prohibits DMV from charging a fee for an original or replacement identification card to a person who can verify the applicant's status as a homeless person or homeless child or youth.

5) Prohibits DMV from charging a fee for an original or replacement identification card to a person who can verify that they meet eligibility requirements for certain public assistance programs, as specified.

6) Requires the DMV to charge an applicant $34 for the issuance or renewal of a driver's license.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: In 2014, Governor Brown signed AB 935 (Frazier), Chapter 644, Statutes of 2014, requiring DMV to issue driver's licenses and identification cards with a veteran designation to eligible applicants, beginning November 2015. The purpose of the designation was intended to give veterans an efficient means of proving their eligibility for benefits and discounts instead of carrying their discharge papers, the DD-214, on their persons at all times. It further provided incentive for veterans to visit their CVSO, who could in turn help them determine what, if any, benefits for which they may be eligible.

In California, the CVSO plays a critical role in veteran's advocacy and is often the initial community contact for veterans' services. Veterans and their families come to CVSOs for free assistance in filing claims with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for the benefits they have earned through their service. Their offices also offer free information and referral to other federal, state, and local programs.

Two instances of veterans applying for the designation, visiting their CVSO, and filing claims were noted in the CACVSO 2019 annual report.

1) An Air Force veteran who was injured off-base in an auto accident in the 1960s attempted to file for benefits from the VA for the neck injury in 1968 and was turned down. In 2017, when his driver license expired, he saw a DMV pamphlet that indicated he could get a veteran designation on his license. He was directed to the Los Angeles County Department of Military and Veterans Affairs where the CVSO, as part of a routine review, ordered medical records and re-discovered the neck injury. The CVSO filed a claim and requested service-related compensation. The VA awarded him $10,000 in back payment and he now receives a monthly payment from the VA for a 90% service-connected disability.

2) A veteran was directed from the DMV to the Lassen County CVSO to be verified as a veteran so he could obtain the veteran designation on his driver license. Since the CVSO had not seen this veteran before, he was screened for possible eligibility for veteran's benefits. The veteran indicated that he had a VA service-connected disability rating of 20%. The CVSO, noticing that the 76 year old veteran had a severely asymmetrical neck, asked him if that injury was the source of his 20% rating, to which he replied yes. The CVSO then assisted him with the process to be re-examined and reassessed, since the laws governing eligibility and medical technology had changed since his medical evaluation 53 years ago. The veteran is now rated at a 90% service connected disability.

As of December 31, 2018, 106,852 veterans have opted to have the veteran designation on their license. According to the California Department of Veteran Affairs, 35,261 veterans applied for benefits as a result of their visit with a CVSO to get the paperwork necessary for the veteran designation. Those veterans are now receiving nearly $74 million in annual benefits. In addition, nearly $40 million in benefits have been awarded retroactively.

In order to pay for the costs of administering the veteran designation program, DMV charges a one-time $5 fee. This fee is currently waived for veterans who are either homeless or meet income eligibility requirements for public assistance programs like CalWORKS, MediI-Cal and CalFresh.

According to the author:

> Current law requires the Department of Motor Vehicles to offer a "veteran" designation on driver's licenses and identification cards. This allows veterans to more easily access benefits available to them, such as veteran discounts, without requiring them to carry their discharge papers (DD-214), which are important legal documents. As of December 2018, the DMV issued over 106,852 licenses and identification cards with "veteran" designations. In this short time, the program has already proved successful by helping 33% of these California

> veterans find additional federal veteran benefits they were entitled to but were previously unaware of, totaling over $40 million of retroactive payments and $73 million to be received annually. Veterans have made significant sacrifices to serve our country and have earned the distinction of a "veteran" designation on their identification – a distinction they should not have to pay for.

Previous legislation: AB 935 (Frazier, Chapter 644, Statutes of 2014) requires the DMV to offer a driver's license or identification card printed with the word "veteran" to an eligible applicant.

AB 363 (Quirk-Silva, Chapter 579, Statutes of 2017) prohibits the DMV from charging the one-time $5 fee to a person applying for a driver's license or identification card with a veteran designation if the applicant is homeless or is determined to have a current income level that meets eligibility requirements for certain public assistance programs.

AB 1873 (Obernolte, 2018) was nearly identical to this bill. The bill was vetoed by Governor Brown.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

AMVETS, Department Of California
Peace Officers Research Association of California
Riverside Sheriffs' Association

Opposition

None on File.

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