

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 2979
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Defense & Veterans' Affairs
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Many veterans are unable to receive the benefits they have earned because they remain unaccounted for or lack the information necessary to access their benefits. However, many veteran-serving organizations lack the information needed to conduct outreach to veterans who qualify for those benefits and inform them of the benefits and other services available to veterans. C.S.H.B. 2979 seeks to address this issue by providing for veterans to self-identify on a voter registration application form and requiring the list of registered voters to contain an indication of a voter's veteran status if stated on the application form and acknowledging that this information is publicly available information, which would provide a source from which veteran-serving organizations could obtain information to conduct veteran outreach.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE IMPACT

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly create a criminal offense, increase the punishment for an existing criminal offense or category of offenses, or change the eligibility of a person for community supervision, parole, or mandatory supervision.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, department, agency, or institution.

ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 2979 amends the Election Code to include among the required elements on the official voter registration application a space or box for indicating whether the applicant served in the U.S. armed forces, including their reserve components, an auxiliary service of one of the branches of the armed forces, and a statement acknowledging that such information is publicly available. The bill requires each issued voter registration certificate and each original and supplemental list of registered voters to contain an indication that the voter is a "veteran," if the voter stated such service on their registration application.

C.S.H.B. 2979 applies only to a voter registration application distributed on or after September 1, 2023.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2023.

COMPARISON OF INTRODUCED AND SUBSTITUTE

While C.S.H.B. 2979 may differ from the introduced in minor or nonsubstantive ways, the following summarizes the substantial differences between the introduced and committee substitute versions of the bill.

While both the introduced and substitute include among the required elements on the official voter registration application form a space or box for indicating an applicant's military service, the introduced specified such service as active military, naval, or air service from which the applicant was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable, whereas the substitute specifies the service as service in the U.S. armed forces, including their reserve components, an auxiliary service of one of the branches of the armed forces, or the state military forces. The substitute also requires the form to include a statement acknowledging that the information regarding the military service is publicly available information, which was not required by the introduced.

The introduced contained provisions that are not included in the substitute requiring the voter registrar to compile a list of each submitted voter application that indicates the applicant's military service as specified in the introduced and discharge and requiring the secretary of state to prescribe procedures for the transmission of collected information to the Texas Veterans Commission. However, the substitute contains a requirement absent from the introduced for each and original supplemental list of registered voters to contain an indication that a voter is a "veteran" if the voter stated the military service as specified in the substitute on the voter's registration application.