

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMPILATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Submitted to the Committee on Corrections  
For HB 5158

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Hearing Date: April 24, 2023 11:00 AM

Virginia Simonson, LTC, US Army - Retired

Texas Council of Chapters, Military Officers Association of America and Self (Retires; volunteer peer specialist)  
Flower Mound, TX

The Texas Council of Chapters, Military Officers Association strongly supports this important and timely bill by Representative Lopez.

Every Veteran who served this country honorably should be allowed to enter a Veterans Treatment Court if they meet eligibility criteria, without regard to current citizen status.

According to Department of Defense (DOD) data, more than 44,000 noncitizens enlisted in the military (between fiscal years 2013 and 2018). Provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act allowed noncitizens who served in the military to acquire U.S. citizenship. Unfortunately, some veterans did not satisfy all eligibility criteria to stay in the US long enough to qualify for citizenship.

Many Veterans with Green Cards were recruited under a special program called Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest (MANVI) established after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. It brought in foreign-born individuals who had critically needed skills to fill manpower shortages as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan dragged on. Like other servicemembers, they experienced multiple combat deployments, they fought, and some died in action. They were not immune to trauma-related mental health issues that also befell many of their native-born brethren.

And, sadly, just like some of the other 107,400 incarcerated Veterans (according to a 2016 Bureau of Justice Report <https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/veterans-prison-survey-prison-inmates-2016>), they became justice-involved after bar-fights, addiction issues and DWIs.

Noncitizens who served in the U.S. military—such as lawful permanent residents who were eligible to enlist—can be detained and deported for reasons like those mentioned above. As a result, many honorable and decorated Veterans will be deported if denied entry into a Veteran Treatment Court - only for non-citizen status.

Not only will they lose the opportunity for dismissal/expungement of their charges, but they may also not be able to receive their earned benefits or receive mental health treatment. That's because, although they may remain eligible for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits/services even after incarceration and deportation they will have trouble accessing them from other countries.

Bottom line - Texas code does not explicitly preclude non-citizen Veterans from entering a Veterans Treatment Court. In fact, it encourages participation based on the likelihood of ensuring public safety through rehabilitation of the veteran (based on objective risk assessments and the professional judgment of the judge and state prosecutor.

Taylor Trevino

self

Austin, TX

I urge legislators to support this bill.

Jessica Dunn, Lieutenant Colonel (Retired)

self

Wimberley, TX

Veterans treatment court program has been successful for many Veterans. Request support of the HB 5158.