
OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 914

AN ACT CONCERNING HMONG LAOTIAN SPECIAL GUERILLA UNITS WHICH SERVED IN THE KINGDOM OF LAOS.

SUMMARY

This bill extends eligibility for certain veterans' benefits to members of the Hmong Laotian special guerilla units that served during the Vietnam war in the U.S. secret war in the Kingdom of Laos. Specifically, the bill extends the following benefits to these individuals:

1. veterans' license plates, including for vehicles used exclusively for farming (§ 1);
2. veteran status on a driver's license or identity card (§ 2);
3. \$1,800 toward funeral expenses or cremation for certain indigent veterans (§ 3); and
4. veterans' ribbon and medal (§ 5).

The bill also allows these Hmong veterans to be buried in a veterans cemetery, which conforms with existing federal law and Department of Veterans Affairs policy (§ 4) (see BACKGROUND).

Under the bill, to claim these benefits, the member (or other applicant, as applicable) must submit a request to the Department of Veterans Affairs and provide the department with (1) an affidavit stating when and where the member served and the unit and capacity in which they served; (2) corroborating witness affidavits, if available; (3) any available official service documentation; and (5) any other supporting documents.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2021

VETERANS' LICENSE PLATES

The law allows qualifying veterans, armed forces members, or their surviving spouses to request a special registration certificate and veterans license plates for any motor vehicle they own or have leased for at least one year, including any motor vehicle they use exclusively for farming if they engage in agricultural production as a trade or profession (CGS § 14-20b). The bill, additionally, allows Hmong Laotian special guerilla unit members or their surviving spouses to request the special registration and plates by (1) submitting a request to the Department of Veterans Affairs to be listed as a veteran based on such service for purposes of this benefit and (2) providing the required documentation described above.

The department must, within 30 days of receiving the request, verify whether the person was a Hmong Laotian special guerilla unit member and, if so, notify the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) commissioner of the request and verification.

As under current law, the DMV commissioner must charge a fee that covers the cost of making the plates, in addition to the motor vehicle registration fee.

VETERAN STATUS ON DRIVER'S LICENSE OR IDENTITY CARD

Existing law requires the DMV commissioner to include a person's status as a veteran on his or her driver's license or identity card. Qualifying veterans must submit a request to the Department of Veterans Affairs, which must verify the veteran's status to the DMV commissioner.

The bill allows Hmong Laotian special guerilla unit members to also request this status on their licenses or identity cards by submitting a request to the Department of Veterans Affairs and providing the required documentation. The department must, within 30 days of receiving the request, verify whether the person was a Hmong Laotian special guerilla unit member and, if so, notify the DMV commissioner of the request and verification.

As under current law, the DMV commissioner must indicate the

member's veteran status on any license or identification card when originally issued, renewed, or issued as a duplicate.

RIBBONS AND MEDALS

The bill requires the veterans affairs commissioner, in consultation with the adjutant general, to (1) award a ribbon and medal to each Hmong Laotian special guerilla unit member who resides in the state and provides the required documentation and (2) adopt regulations for doing so. The regulations must (1) identify the eligible members, (2) establish the process for designing the ribbon and medal, (3) set the procedures for distributing them.

The Military Department's military assistance account must fund the cost of the ribbons and medals. Under the bill, ribbons and medals may be posthumously awarded within existing budgetary resources.

BACKGROUND

Hmong Veterans Eligibility for Burial in the State Veterans Cemetery

Eligibility for burial in the State Veterans Cemetery is based on the federal eligibility requirements for burial in national veterans' cemeteries. Under federal law, Hmong veterans are eligible for burial in Department of Veterans Affairs national cemeteries if they (1) died on or after March 23, 2018; (2) resided in the U.S. at the time of their death; and (3) were naturalized citizens under the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000 (38 U.S.C. § 2402(a)(10)). Pursuant to this law, existing state Department of Veterans Affairs policy establishes a procedure by which the families of these eligible veterans may apply to the department to determine burial eligibility in the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Veterans' Affairs Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 17 Nay 0 (03/18/2021)