

AB 258 (Chavez) – State Agencies: Veterans

Introduced February 7, 2013, Amended April 23, 2013

This bill would change 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 United States military?"
- 2) Specifies that this section shall apply only to a written form or written publication that is newly printed on or after July 1, 2014.

Background:

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. 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 [CRB] 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."

Existing law does not specify the form of this kind of inquiry.

Fiscal Effect: According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, minor costs to state agencies to change written materials that inquire as to a person's veteran status.

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY APRIL 23, 2013

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE—2013–14 REGULAR SESSION

ASSEMBLY BILL

No. 258

Introduced by Assembly Member Chávez

February 7, 2013

An act to add Section 11019.11 to the Government Code, relating to state agencies.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 258, as amended, Chávez. State agencies: veterans.

Existing law provides for the governance and regulation of state agencies, as defined. Existing law provides certain benefits and protections for members of the Armed Forces of the United States.

This bill would require, *on or after July 1, 2014*, every state agency that requests on any written form or written publication, or through its Internet Web site, whether a person is a veteran, to request that information in a specified manner.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: yes.
State-mandated local program: no.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Section 11019.11 is added to the Government
2 Code, to read:
3 11019.11. (a) Every state agency that requests on any written
4 form or written publication, or through its Internet Web site,
5 whether a person is a veteran, shall request that information only
6 in the following format: "Have you ever served in the *United States*
7 military?"

- 1 (b) This section shall apply only to a written form or written
- 2 publication that is newly printed on or after ~~January~~ *July* 1, 2014.

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