

Good morning Chairman Schauer and members of the GVA Committee. My name is Greg Stemen, State Representative in District 27. My district includes a portion of South Fargo as well as the communities of Horace, Oxbow, Hickson and the rural agricultural area to the southern edge of Cass County.

I stand before you today to introduce House Bill 1222 on behalf of the North Dakota Department of Veteran's Affairs. What this bill does is expand the definition of "Veteran" status to include those who are in the process of serving at the end of their service commitment.

Currently, military personnel need to submit a copy of their discharge papers in order to be awarded Veterans Service Points. What is happening now, is that military branches are assisting the upcoming discharging members in gaining employment prior to actual discharge.

This change in language would allow members to be eligible for "preference points" to better compete for employment as they are finishing their commitment prior to discharge.

Another important aspect of this definition expansion is that it would bring state statute in line with current Federal Veterans Preference Laws under Chapter 21 of Title 5 United States Code Sub Section 2108a. This was changed in 2011 under the VOW Act (Veterans Opportunity to Work) (Hire Heroes Act) Public Law 112-56. It would also amend the DD214 from active duty in the uniformed services under other than "dishonorable" conditions not later than 120 days after the date of the submission of the certification.

The next allowance this would provide is that all current or prior members in good standing would be eligible for the five veterans preference points. While current law requires 20 years of service prior to eligibility, this expansion would factor in the reality that most guard members have a civilian career while serving the 20 years. Also, if a guard member served in a combat zone, they would be eligible as a "veteran" under section 8 (a).

An important value of this expansion of the definition of "Veteran" status is to help our discharging veterans gain employment in a more seamless manner and help to strengthen the workforce in North Dakota. I want to emphasize; this bill only changes the definition of a "Veteran" for this section of the law-veterans employment preference. No other benefits are affected.

I respectfully ask for your support of HB 1222 and I will welcome the opportunity to stand for questions. I do want to inform the committee that Lonnie Wangen, Commissioner of North Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs is available to answer any questions you may have as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members.