

Testimony for HB 1389

Expanding Veterans Home Eligibility

from Rep. Karla Rose Hanson
for the House Human Services Committee on 1/31/23

Chairman Weisz and members of the Committee,

My name is Karla Rose Hanson, and I represent District 44. Today, I'm introducing HB 1389. This bill would expand who is eligible for admission at the North Dakota Veterans Home.

As background, the ND Veterans Home in Lisbon has cared for America's heroes and their spouses since 1893. Today it provides skilled care and basic care.

According to the Veterans Home, its 98 basic care beds are about 70% filled and its 52 skilled care beds are about 90% filled. However, the long-term projection is a decline of 10-20%. This bill would slightly enlarge the pool of eligible residents to partially offset that loss, while still limiting it to individuals whose long-term care costs are covered by federal funding.

The bill does the following:

- It would slightly expand ND's definition of who is eligible to live at the Veterans Home. This includes a narrow set of National Guard members who meet certain criteria – while still limiting it to individuals whose stay would be covered by the federal per diem.
- It changes “honorably discharged” to “discharged or released under other than dishonorable conditions.” This mirrors the language used in 37-01-40 where we define “veteran.” The NDNG believes this is an important change, citing the scenario of a person who sustained injuries during training and was discharged for the injury; in this situation, the categorization of the discharge would commonly be something other than honorable. And individuals in this group could later be eligible to enroll with and receive care from the VA for on-going issues or issues that arise later in life connected to the injury that occurred while they were in the National Guard.
- It changes “North Dakota” to “United States” when referring to the National Guard – to allow for the situation when a ND resident served in the National Guard of a neighboring state – like a Fargo resident serving in the Minnesota National Guard.
- The bill also updates language such as changing “soldiers” to “service members” and it adds “reserve” - which is often left out.

The bill has the support of:

- The ND Veterans Home
- The ND Dept of Veterans Affairs
- The ND National Guard
- ND Veterans Legislative Council

Neither the Veterans Home nor the ND National Guard anticipate a large number of individuals being impacted by the changes in this bill. The Veterans Home does not believe that the changes will lead to a demand that exceeds their capacity.

In conclusion, HB 1389 would enable a few more people who have served their country to get the long-term care they need and fill a few of the home's empty beds going forward, without a cost to the state. I urge a do-pass recommendation and I'll stand for any questions. Thank you.