

TESTIMONY ON HB 1389
Expanding North Dakota Veterans Home Eligibility

From Susie Schlecht, Marketing/Admissions Coordinator North Dakota Veterans Home
For the Senate Agriculture & Veterans Affairs Committee 3/10/2023

Chairman Luick and members of the Committee, I am Susie Schlecht, the Marketing/Admissions Coordinator at the North Dakota Veterans Home. I am here today to testify in favor of the proposed changes to House Bill 1389.

In the role, I serve, it has been a privilege to share about the North Dakota Veterans Home with veterans across the state. On more than one occasion, I have visited with veterans who have shared that they are not eligible to reside at the North Dakota Veterans Home as they do not meet the definition of a veteran in N.D.C.C. 37-01-40. These veterans are enrolled in Veterans Affairs healthcare and have percentages of service-connected disability ratings through Veterans Affairs.

I want to share a specific example of a veteran interested in admission to the North Dakota Veterans Home who is not eligible:

Veteran A: Veteran A served in the Navy for five months and 27 days and had an honorable discharge. His length of service needs to meet the requirements under N.D.C.C. 37-01-40. Veteran A has an 80% service-connected disability rating through Veterans Affairs. As he is enrolled in VA healthcare, the North Dakota Veterans Home would receive a per diem if he was eligible for admission to the North Dakota Veterans Home. Veteran A qualifies to reside at VA contract nursing homes, yet at this time, he would not be eligible for the North Dakota Veterans Home due to the current definition.

By expanding the Character of Service types as Commissioner Wangen testifies, we expect to see applicants who were not eligible under the current definition. If the identified changes are made in lines 10-15 in House Bill 1389, the North Dakota Veterans Home and veterans will benefit. From a marketing viewpoint, we plan to share with County Veteran Service Officers the update to the bill so they can share the information with veterans in their counties who were previously ineligible for residency at the North Dakota Veterans Home.

As mentioned, the potential applicants must be enrolled in Veterans Affairs healthcare before admission to the Veterans Home. The per diem that the North Dakota Veterans Home receives for veterans enrolled in VA healthcare helps to offset costs to our facility. Helping Veterans and being fiscally minded about our state's great resources will be met with the proposed changes.

The number of individuals impacted by this change may not be extensive; however, it will make a tremendous difference in the lives of those it does pertain to. It is an honor to serve our heroes and the citizens who ensure they are well cared for. Thank you, Rep. Hanson, for supporting this bill change. Thank you, Chairman Luick and committee members, for your time.