

SUBJECT: Standardizing fees for issuance of military license plates, registration

COMMITTEE: Transportation — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 9 ayes — Krusee, Phillips, Harper-Brown, Deshotel, Haggerty, Harless, Hill, Macias, Murphy

0 nays

WITNESSES: For — None

Against — None

On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Rebecca Davio, Texas Department of Transportation)

BACKGROUND: HB 2971 by Harper-Brown, enacted by the 78th Legislature in 2003, added subchapter D to Transportation Code, ch. 504 to govern the issuance of specialty license plates for the military. Among those eligible for specialty license plates are honorably discharged veterans of recent major conflicts; surviving spouses of certain veterans; members or former members of the U.S. military; and current members of the Texas National Guard, Texas State Guard, and reserves in the U.S. military. Honors earning special mention on the face of the plate include recipients of the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Purple Heart.

Fees for issuing plates vary. Veterans of recent major conflicts, reserves in the U.S. Armed Forces, and members of the Texas National Guard and Texas State Guard are not charged for a specialty license plate. Those seeking license plates honoring general service in a branch of the military or auxiliary service must pay \$10 for the first set of plates and \$15 for each additional set of plates. For those who have been honored with an extraordinary service medal, such as a Distinguished Flying Cross or Purple Heart, the charge for the first set of specialty plates is \$3 and \$15 for each additional set.

Registration fees vary. Anyone honored for distinguished service, except for those who earned the Distinguished Flying Cross medal, does not pay a registration fee. Those eligible for service plates pay a registration fee.

DIGEST:

CSHB 191 would create tiers of military license plates and assign registration and plate issuance fees accordingly. The bill would repeal or remove all language in existing statute that addresses these charges and would establish one provision, sec. 504.3015, governing all military specialty plates except those for disabled veterans covered under a separate statute.

It would provide that anyone applying for a set of military specialty license plates would be required to pay the registration fee defined by Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT). This charge would not be applied for the first set of license plates issued to those eligible for plates honoring:

- recipients of the Distinguished Flying Cross;
- recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor;
- recipients of the Air Force Cross;
- recipients of the Distinguished Service Cross;
- recipients of the Army Distinguished Service Cross;
- recipients of the Navy Cross;
- recipients of the Medal of Honor;
- recipients of the Purple Heart;
- Pearl Harbor survivors; and
- prisoners of war.

No fees would be set for the issuance of any military license plates, except for a \$3 fee for those eligible for plates honoring:

- Pearl Harbor survivors;
- prisoners of war; and
- recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor.

A surviving spouse of a person who would be eligible for a specialty plate would pay the fees associated with that type of license plate.

The bill also would amend the statute to require that a vehicle registered under this section must be used by the person who qualified under the section.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2007.

SUPPORTERS
SAY:

CSHB 191 would streamline the fee structure for military specialty license plates, simplifying the process for veterans and TxDOT and properly allowing for those who have received the same types of honors to pay the same fees for license plates and vehicle registration.

Today's system for honoring veterans through specialty license plates has unfortunately become a bureaucratic headache because of the varied fees associated with each type of plate. TxDOT spends a great deal of time and resources programming for each separate plate. Some veterans are improperly charged in relation to their counterparts; a Distinguished Flying Cross medal recipient pays a \$3 fee plus registration fees when issued his first set of license plates, while all other veterans honored for distinguished service pay just \$3.

The bill would establish three general tiers: meritorious service; recognition awards; and service. Those who received the highest military honors, such as the Congressional Medal of Honor or Legion of Valor medals, would only pay a registration fee when applying for additional sets of license plates. Those honored for extraordinary service, such as Purple Heart honorees or prisoners of war, would pay the same fees as those acknowledged for meritorious service, plus a \$3 issuance fee for an initial set of plates. Veterans eligible for plates honoring general service would pay a registration fee but no additional fees any time they sought license plates.

TxDOT expects it would absorb any costs incurred by this bill. It would save money through efficiencies created through the new streamlined fee structure. Additionally, although most fees would decrease, certain fees, including those for replacement plates, would either remain the same or increase slightly, offsetting any major differences with today's revenue.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

No apparent opposition.

NOTES:

The author plans to introduce three floor amendments that would:

- specify fees or fee waivers for replacement license plates under certain sections;
- grant this bill controlling status in setting uniform and consistent fees and allow for the change to any fees set for military plates authorized during the 80th Legislature; and

- conform language of the bill to account for repealed sections.

The original version of the bill would only have covered fees for issuance and renewal of license plates to current and former members of the U.S. military.