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AB 408 – Disabled Veteran License Plate Streamlining

SUMMARY

AB 408 would streamline the process to receive a disabled veteran license plate by allowing for County Veteran Service Offices or the California Department of Veterans Affairs, in addition to the US Department of Veterans Affairs, to verify an individual's disabled veteran status. The bill would maintain the requirements of the statute to only issue disabled veteran license plates to veterans meeting specific criteria. However, the bill would also amend the applicable definition of "disabled veteran" to clarify the language and eliminate ambiguity without significantly altering the underlying criteria.

BACKGROUND

In the past, California has used a California-unique letter issued by the US Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) to substantiate that a veteran applying for Disabled Veteran (DV) license plates was qualified to receive them. Historically, the process operated without delay since all paperwork for California veterans came from one of the three USDVA Regional Offices located in California. However, over the last 5-10 years an increasing number of USDVA veteran requests for documentation from their records have been distributed to Regional Offices throughout the United States as a means to balance workload and to prevent backlogs.

As a result, when a veteran makes a request for the DV letter from the USDVA the request is more likely to be fulfilled by a Regional Office outside California. Regional Offices outside California are oftentimes unaware of the California-unique

documentation and typically send the veteran a response indicating that the office cannot process the request. The unfortunate consequence of this change at the federal level is that the veteran lacks the necessary documentation for DMV to issue the DV plate. The current process is overly bureaucratic, frustrating to eligible veterans, and unnecessarily delays a benefit disabled veterans have justifiably earned.

County Veteran Service Offices (CVSOs) and the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) now have electronic access to the same claims record data that the USDVA uses to generate the DV plate letter and can validate the service connected disability status of the DV plate applicant. The DV plate applicant would still be required to obtain medical certification that they meet the DV plate medical criteria, which would be clarified but not significantly altered.

PURPOSE

By streamlining the DV license plate process, this bill would add CVSOs and CalVet to the list of organizations that can verify an individual's disabled veteran status. By additionally clarifying existing eligibility language, this change will improve service at the DMV for eligible disabled veterans, and eliminate an unnecessary and frustrating delay that impedes eligible disabled veterans' access to a rightly earned benefit.

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