

Senate Executive Departments and Administration Committee

Ben Mickens 271-1403

SB 448-FN, modifying the definition of veteran and relative to lifetime hunting and fishing license fees for disabled veterans.

Hearing Date: January 8, 2026

Time Opened: 10:05 a.m.

Time Closed: 10:24 a.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Pearl, McGough, Gannon, Altschiller and Reardon

Members of the Committee Absent : None

Bill Analysis: This bill:

I. Changes the definition of veteran and expands eligibility for state benefits and programs that depend on veteran status, ensuring that individuals discharged under honorable conditions, including those with a general discharge under honorable conditions, are not excluded from eligibility.

II. Establishes a lifetime combination hunting and fishing license for state resident veterans, with a one-time fee adjusted according to the veteran's service-connected disability rating.

Sponsors:

Sen. Innis

Sen. Long

Sen. Avard

Sen. McGough

Sen. McConkey

Sen. Ward

Sen. Murphy

Sen. Pearl

Sen. Rochefort

Sen. Gannon

Sen. Carson

Sen. Perkins Kwoka

Sen. Abbas

Rep. Harvey-Bolia

Rep. See

Rep. Sellers

Rep. Thibault

Who supports the bill: Sen. Dan Innis, Sen. Howard Pearl, Sen. Tim McGough, Sen. Mark McConkey, Sen. David Rochefort, Sen. Ruth Ward, Major Gen. David Mikolaities (DMAVS), Nicole Desilets-Bixler (DMAVS), Brent Fraser (DMAVS), Tony Gagnon (NGANH), Kim MacKay (NHVH), Leo Paquin (SVAC), Kevin Grady (SVAC), Margaret LaBrecque, Eric Pauer

Who opposes the bill: Melissa Nemeth (NHFG), Jessica Whelehan (NHFG)

Who is neutral on the bill: Jim Michaud

Summary of testimony presented in support:

Senator Dan Innis:

- The bill has two parts.
 - o 1st, it hopes to address some ambiguity on the definition of veteran and include any discharge under honorable conditions as part of the definition for veteran benefits.
 - o Amendment offered helps clarify this definition applies throughout
 - o 2nd, it establishes a lifetime combination hunting and fishing license. Currently only veterans 100% disabled can get a fee-free license for state parks. The bill would include adjusted fees for veterans based on service-related disability ratings. There is significant data to support the importance of outdoor activity for veteran mental health outcomes.

I am open to changing as needed to address concerns of Fish and Games.

Major Gen. David Mikolaities:

- We support this bill and the minor revisions in the proposed amendment. When someone is discharged, they receive a particular defense department form. This bill better specifies who qualifies to get veteran benefits in New Hampshire by capturing the two "good" discharges.

Mr. Kevin Grady:

- We found out last year that a general discharge did not qualify for veterans plates, which is not good.
- We are aiming to get a wide range of definitions cleaned up, like this bill does.

Summary of testimony presented in opposition:

Melissa Nemeth and Jessica Whelehan (NHFG)

- We have begun discussions with Sen. Innis on how to work through this.
- Department currently offers a range of options for veterans. Concerns around the bill are purely financial.
- It is hard to quantify how many people have purchased veterans lifetime in the past.
- There are a number issues, including that it only includes combination licenses and the possibility of retroactive refunds. Sen. Innis has expressed an openness to work out concerns.

Senator Howard Pearl asked if NHFG would be willing to work with sponsor prior to the bills hearing in the Finance Committee to get to a mutually agreeable place.

Ms. Nemeth indicated she would need to get formal approval, but it was possible.

Neutral Information Presented:

Mr. Jim Michaud:

- Chief Assessor, Town of Hudson. Neither speaking for Hudson Board of Select nor for NHAO.
- I am worried about towns applying the statute correctly. Normally, towns look for specific terms regarding discharges. We want to make sure all discharges that are meant to be included are caught in the language.
- Additionally, the bill would add around 4 thousand more veterans who may apply for tax credits. This would only take place after a community adopts or readopts veterans tax credit.
- At the local level, the last expense added to tax rate is total veterans tax.

Senator Pearl asked if Mr. Michaud believed this legislation would require a new vote at the town level.

Mr. Michaud said he believed so.

BM
Date Hearing Report completed: January 12, 2026