



Permanent Residents for Law Enforcement House Bill 1091

Conceived by Chief Art Acevedo in an attempt to increase the pool of qualified candidates for employment with the police department, HB 1091 seeks to allow legal permanent residents who were Honorably Discharged from the US Military to become Peace Officers in Texas. Currently, applicants must be citizens.

Recognizing that legal permanent residents who serve on the front lines in the military are just as capable of serving the front lines as an officer, this bill allows PDs to increase recruiting pool and also provides an employment opportunity for certain veterans upon discharge.

Benefit to the PDs and communities

Police departments across Texas face significant challenges in the recruitment and retention of officers, for a variety of reasons. As we deal with these recruiting shortfalls, we are also cognizant of the need for a diverse workforce that reflects the changing demographic of our communities. This bill would allow us to tap into a promising group of applicants to satisfy both of those needs by providing an avenue for these applicants to continue their service. Veterans, especially those who are foreign-born, can bring needed diversity to police departments, both in culture and language skills, which are extremely important to building trust with communities. This is especially true in diverse communities like Houston.

Veterans also do a good job and make good officers. Understand service to a greater cause and that sense of purpose should be fostered when they get home. They understand unit cohesion, have a servant's heart, understand even basic things like chain of command. There are lots of reasons why people do not want to become police officers in the current climate, so we should encourage those that do. Anyone eligible to defend the country should be eligible to serve their communities by keeping the streets safe. This bill will allow us to access a diverse, talented, hardworking and patriotic pool.

This proposed policy is an important step in the evolution of modern police departments. Over the years, requirements for being a police officer have changed. Qualifications have evolved. Gender, height, race, etc restrictions have been removed and the focus should be on one's knowledge, skills, commitment, and ability to perform the job effectively.

As honorably discharged veterans, these potential applicants have demonstrated an allegiance to the United States and have shown a spirit for service. They have also undergone security checks and extensive training. HPD would rather remove this barrier to application than propose lower educational requirements or get rid of other standards simply to increase recruiting. Houston cannot afford to do that. But allowing LPR veterans to apply would help recruit a qualified, competent workforce. The fact that an honorably discharged vet is a legal permanent resident should be a non-

factor with regard to application to be a peace officer. Good enough for the military, good enough for Texas law enforcement and this bill simply expands employment opportunities upon discharge

Selective hiring

The law enforcement hiring process is incredibly selective and removing a citizenship requirement provides no guarantee that any LPRs will be hired. In many departments, upward of 90 percent of applicants for law enforcement officer positions are rejected. Removing a citizenship requirement is not a magic solution that will immediately fill all vacancies or diversify a police force, but it may help.

No magic bullet

We are under no illusions that this will end the shortage of officers. Even if every honorably discharged legal permanent resident were to apply, we would still be searching for qualified people. But the need for potential officers, especially from diverse backgrounds, must be addressed, and this is a population we're ignoring for no justifiable reason. HB 1091 will open that door and provide an opportunity to veterans that may benefit departments and our communities and for this reason HPD hopes for your favorable consideration.

In 2009, nearly 8 percent of military personnel on active duty were foreign-born, and more than 30,000 LPRs were serving as of 2013. HPD currently has 5200 officers, of which around 1900 are veterans. Almost 1/3 of our department are veterans.

Stats?

Not many stats because law enforcement applicants are unique in that many conduct in depth research on their profession of choice. This could lead to the assumption of those individuals without citizenship are aware they are not eligible to apply, therefore they rarely if ever approach law enforcement recruiters.

Other states:

Hawaii, Vermont, Tennessee, Illinois, and Colorado.

Cincinnati and LA county SO allows LPRs if citizenship within a certain amount of time.

LPR information

About a million individuals each year establish lawful permanent resident status in the United States. Obtaining this status, commonly known as receiving a "green card," permits an individual to live and work in the United States on a permanent basis. They can get jobs, own property, and receive financial aid to public universities and join the military. In recent years, about half of new LPRs have been new arrivals to the United States, while the rest — slightly more than half — already were present in the United States and adjusted from a different status. According to military.com, roughly 35,000 non-citizens are serving in active duty military and about 8,000 join each year.

The majority of people who obtain green cards qualify because they are immediate family members of U.S. citizens or LPRs. The rest qualify under employment-based preferences, as refugees or asylees, or in other qualifying categories, including Diversity Immigrant visas (commonly referred to as the green-card lottery).

In order to become an LPR, an individual must:

- Fall under one of the immigrant categories established in the Immigration and Nationality Act,
- Have a qualifying immigrant petition filed and approved,
 - Most immigrants seeking to become LPRs will need an approved immigrant petition. The petition "establishes the underlying basis for your ability to immigrate and

determines your immigrant classification or category.” Family members or employers may file immigrant petitions on behalf of aspiring LPRs, with different LPRs utilizing category-specific forms.

- Have an immigrant visa available immediately, and
 - While visas are always made available for immediate relatives of U.S. citizens, others in family- or employment-based preference categories may have to wait years — sometimes a decade or more — for a visa
- Be admissible to the United States.
 - all individuals seeking adjustment of status or applying for an immigrant visa must satisfy the relevant immigration or consular officials that they are admissible to the United States. Threats to public health, public safety, and national security are potential grounds of inadmissibility that would bar someone from becoming an LPR. To determine admissibility, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) conducts a background check including an FBI name check, an FBI fingerprint check and an Interagency Border Inspection System (IBIS) name check