



**San Diego County
Water Authority**
Our Region's Trusted
Water Leader

AB 1588 (Gloria/Gray)



Objective: Ensure military veterans transitioning into civilian water and wastewater operator occupations receive appropriate crediting for experience and education gained during military service.

Support:

AFSCME
American GI Forum of California
AMVETS- Department of CA
Association of California Water
Agencies
California Association of County
Veterans Service Officers
California Association of Sanitation
Agencies
California State Commanders Veterans
Council
California Water Association
Chula Vista Chamber of Commerce
City of San Diego
Council of Water Utilities
East County Economic Development
Council
East County Chamber of Commerce
Eastern Municipal Water District
Escondido Chamber of Commerce
Irvine Ranch Water District
Mesa Water District
Metropolitan Water District of
Southern California
National City Chamber
Northern California Water Association
Oceanside Chamber of Commerce
Otay Mesa Chamber of Commerce
Otay Water District
Padre Dam Municipal Water District
Rainbow Municipal Water District
Rural County Representatives of
California
San Diego County Board of Supervisors
San Diego County Water Authority
San Diego Military Advisory Council
San Diego North Economic
Development Council
San Diego Regional Chamber of
Commerce
San Diego Regional Economic
Development Corporation
San Diego Veterans Coalition
San Diego Workforce Partnership
San Marcos Chamber of Commerce
San Ysidro Chamber of Commerce
Santa Clara Valley Water District
South County Economic Development
Council
Spring Valley Chamber of Commerce
Sweetwater Authority
Turlock Irrigation District
U.S. Veterans Chamber of Commerce
Valley Center Municipal Water District
Veterans Village of San Diego
Vietnam Veterans of American
California State Council
Vista Chamber of Commerce

AB 1588

AB 1588 would:

- Provide a path of reciprocity to military veterans to apply their advanced skills and experience toward state and industry-supplied certifications, or positions within the public or private sectors that specify certifications, within the water and wastewater treatment and distribution operator fields.

BACKGROUND

In 1971, laws and regulations governing the certification of potable water treatment facility operations were enacted. The regulations establish at what level water treatment facilities should be staffed, the minimum qualifications for testing at each of the five grade levels of water treatment system operator, and the criteria for the renewal and revocation of operator certificates. The Drinking Water



Operator Certification Program, under the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB), is responsible for the testing and certification of approximately 35,000 water treatment and water distribution operators throughout the state of California. The SWRCB also administers the Wastewater Operator Certification program which provides for Wastewater Treatment Plant Certification examinations, certifications, and certification renewals. There are approximately 6,000 active certified wastewater treatment plant operators in California.

Water and wastewater treatment is an essential and well-established industry with an aging infrastructure and workforce. Replacement of critical infrastructure components, like 100-year-old pipes and pumps, while maintaining service to customers, is one of the greatest challenges in the industry today. In addition, the high-level of retirements, new technologies, and increased demand for safe drinking water also contribute to the pressure on the industry to adapt.

At the same time that the water and wastewater industries are experiencing an aging and retiring workforce, more than 250,000 U.S. military members leave military service each year, according to the Department of Defense. Dozens of offices and agencies and thousands of private organizations are focused on assisting service members, veterans, and their families to successfully reintegrate after military service. Despite the abundance of available resources,

there continue to be missed opportunities – particularly within the water and wastewater treatment operator field – to find, educate, certify, and employ veterans transitioning to civilian employment.

Projections of demand for water operators are fueled by a high level of expected retirements among the experienced workforce and the continued increase in demand for water by both residential and commercial customers. According to recent industry reports, thousands of water workers are aging and expected to retire from their positions in coming years, leading to a huge gap to fill for utilities and other water employers. New entrants to the industry need education and training to obtain state certification and incumbent workers need additional credits when they seek a higher level of state certification.

Several states – including Washington, Texas, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania – provide paths for military veterans to navigate the civilian water system operator certification process and allow the application of equivalency standards to credit military experiences toward state or industry certifications in the water and wastewater treatment and distribution fields. However, there is no similar pathway or equivalency standard process for military veterans in California. The California water industry and other similar skilled trade industries would have a much larger pool of highly skilled, motivated, and talented individuals eager to continue their service to the public and the community at large if military veterans were offered experience credit toward state or industry certifications.

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