

Bill Would Expand Off-Base Housing Options

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A Virginia lawmaker wants to improve off-base living conditions for enlisted troops with families by making it easier for them to qualify for affordable housing.

Rep. Glenn Nye, D-Va., wants to give service members a better chance of getting into the apartments by excluding military housing allowances from being counted as income when determining eligibility for housing built under Section 42 of the Internal Revenue Code.

That provision gives tax breaks to developers who build affordable apartments that are restricted to low-income families. Section 42 is sometimes known as the “affordable housing” initiative in apartment advertising. Sometimes only some units in a larger apartment complex are covered by the income caps and reduced rent.

Nye said that in Virginia Beach, Va., the income cutoff is \$36,600. An E-5 with a family of three is not eligible today because his pay and allowances total \$46,791. But if his housing allowance were excluded, his annual pay would be of \$29,871 — and he would qualify for the affordable housing.

Income levels are set by county or metropolitan area by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Rents also are determined by HUD.

The change proposed Monday by Nye, which he calls the Military Families Affordable Homes Act of 2009, is not unprecedented. Some exceptions to the income rules that help service members already exist, but they apply in narrow areas.

The exceptions already in place are: U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo.; Fort Shafter, Hawaii; Fort Riley, Kan.; Annapolis Naval Station and the U.S. Naval Academy in Maryland; Fort Jackson, S.C.; Fort Bliss and Fort Hood in Texas; the Dam Neck Training Center Atlantic in Virginia; and Naval Station Bremerton, Wash.

Nye’s bill, which he plans to introduce Tuesday, would apply the exceptions first created in 2008 to troops throughout the U.S.

“Right now, military personnel at most Hampton Roads bases are at a disadvantage when they apply to live in affordable housing developments,” Nye said. “This bill will help our troops provide a good home for their families.”

Nye is a member of the House armed services and veterans’ affairs committees.