

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2595

As Reported by House Committee On:
State Government & Tribal Affairs

Title: An act relating to veterans' relief.

Brief Description: Including national guard members in county veterans' assistance programs.

Sponsors: Representatives Rolfes, Linville, Moeller, Appleton, Ormsby, VanDeWege, Seaquist, Hurst, Sells, Haigh, Morrell, Campbell, Upthegrove, Lias, Chase, Barlow, Green and Kelley.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government & Tribal Affairs: 1/25/08, 2/1/08 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Expands the definition of "veteran" for purposes of veterans' relief programs to include current members of the National Guard and Armed Forces Reserves who have been deployed for active duty.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL AFFAIRS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Hunt, Chair; Appleton, Vice Chair; Chandler, Ranking Minority Member; Armstrong, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Kretz, Lias, Miloscia and Ormsby.

Staff: Marsha Reilly (786-7135).

Background:

The legislative authority of a county with a city, town, or precinct containing qualifying indigent and suffering veterans or family members must provide funds for the relief of these veterans and family members. The legislative authority must consult with and solicit recommendations from the applicable veterans' advisory board to determine the appropriate services needed for local indigent veterans. Veterans' assistance programs must at least

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partially be funded by the Veterans' Assistance Fund established in the county through a tax levy.

For purposes of veterans' relief programs, "veteran" has the same meaning as in RCW 41.04.005 and 41.04.007. Generally, the definitions include honorably discharged veterans of wars and armed conflicts, as well as honorably discharged veterans of any branch of the service.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The definition of "veteran" for purposes of veterans' relief programs is expanded to include current members of the National Guard and Armed Forces Reserves who have been deployed for active duty.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill adds the Armed Forces Reserves to the definition of veteran for purposes of the veterans' relief program and changes the requirement to be "deployed to serve in an armed conflict" to "deployed for active duty."

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill was brought forward by the county Veterans' Affairs Committee. It modernizes the legislation that created the soldiers and sailors account nearly a century ago. The National Guard have served our state since 1855 and continue to serve with distinction and represent us all over the world. Under current law, the county provides support for the American military for needy veterans. But under the current definition, national guardsmen are not covered. This bill makes sure that these people are included in the definition and in the funding that gets dispersed.

The Veterans' Legislative Coalition is in support of the bill. The National Guard are a valuable asset and should be treated with respect after they serve and should be included in the relief programs.

The Paralyzed Veterans of America supports the bill. When Proposition 1 was passed in King County three years ago to increase property levels for the Soldiers and Sailors Act Fund, it was anticipated that the 8,400 National Guard would be part of the \$5.5 billion that would be raised in King County, as well as in other county efforts.

The Kitsap County Veterans Advisory Board supports the bill. The bill goes almost far enough. The current definition does not include the ready reservists who are called to active duty at the will of the President. This would include those called to serve in the hurricane Katrina aftermath. These people go from gainful employment to that of their service pay, resulting in an immediate hardship for the family. Serving in an armed conflict should not be the only parameter for serving our country.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Rolfes, prime sponsor; Mike Partridge, Veterans Legal Coalition; Skip Dreps, Paralyzed Veterans of America; and Roth Hafter, Kitsap County Veterans.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.