S-1641.1

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**SENATE BILL 5849**

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**State of Washington 65th Legislature 2017 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Angel, Bailey, Rolfes, Braun, Brown, Sheldon, Pearson, Becker, Fortunato, Wilson, Palumbo, O'Ban, Warnick, and Conway

AN ACT Relating to veterans' services; amending RCW 43.60A.100; adding a new section to chapter 43.41 RCW; and creating new sections.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature finds that:

(1) Veterans are national heroes who have made great sacrifices in their lives for the protection of our nation;

(2) Due to the relatively high number of military installations in our state, as well as the standard of living in our state, many veterans choose to live in Washington;

(3) Many veterans have a need for support services, including peer-to-peer counseling services. Some veterans need to talk about their experiences with combat, deployment, or other situations experienced during their time in the military. Often, there is no person better prepared to speak with a veteran about his or her experiences than another veteran;

(4) In 2009, the state of Texas created an award winning peer-to-peer counseling network, called the military veteran peer network. On a voluntary basis, veterans elect to receive specialized training about the facilitation of group counseling sessions. After receiving their training, the volunteers create peer-to-peer support groups in their local communities;

(5) Veterans living in Washington would benefit from a program that is similar to the military veteran peer network.

**Sec.**  RCW 43.60A.100 and 1991 c 55 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

The department of veterans affairs, to the extent funds are made available, shall: (1) Contract with professional counseling specialists to provide a range of direct treatment services to war-affected state veterans and to those national guard and reservists who served in the Middle East, and their family members; (2) provide additional treatment services to Washington state Vietnam veterans for posttraumatic stress disorder, particularly for those veterans whose posttraumatic stress disorder has intensified or initially emerged due to the war in the Middle East; (3) provide an educational program designed to train primary care professionals, such as mental health professionals, about the effects of war-related stress and trauma; (4) provide informational and counseling services for the purpose of establishing and fostering peer-support networks throughout the state for families of deployed members of the reserves and the Washington national guard; (5) provide for veterans' families, a referral network of community mental health providers who are skilled in treating deployment stress, combat stress, and posttraumatic stress; and (6) offer training and support for volunteers interested in providing peer-to-peer support to other veterans.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature finds that:

(1) Washington state provides a stated preference for hiring veterans and provides a scoring preference for hiring and promotional opportunities to veterans in the form of enhanced test scores;

(2) Few agencies outside of law enforcement use tests in hiring or promotion;

(3) Veterans have experience that is broader than law enforcement and the state can benefit by recruiting people with this experience;

(4) Veterans leave service with experience in transportation, teaching and education, logistics, computer technology, health care, media and communications, construction and engineering, and administrative support;

(5) Many state agencies and other public employers are struggling to fill and retain employees in key positions;

(6) Many public and private employers have developed veteran hiring and recruitment programs that take advantage of the broad experience that veterans bring to the job market.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 43.41 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The office shall develop a military recruitment program that targets veterans and gives them credit for their knowledge, skills, and leadership abilities. In developing the program, the office shall consult with the department of enterprise services, department of veteran affairs, and other interested stakeholders. Program development must include, but is not limited to, identifying: (a) Public and private military recruitment programs and ways those programs can be used in Washington; (b) similar military and state job classes and develop a system to provide veterans with experience credit for similar work; and (c) barriers to state employment and opportunities to better utilize veterans experience.

(2) The office shall report to the legislature with a draft plan by January 1, 2018, that includes draft bill language if necessary.

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