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**SENATE BILL 5772**

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**State of Washington 66th Legislature 2019 Regular Session**

**By** Senators O'Ban and Conway

AN ACT Relating to increasing employment opportunities for spouses of military members; adding a new section to chapter 73.16 RCW; adding new sections to chapter 43.41 RCW; and creating a new section.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The legislature makes the following findings:

(a) Spouses of military members make great sacrifices in supporting the mission and service of their husbands and wives, including leaving jobs and careers to accompany their spouses on reassignment to a different state or overseas. Such sacrifices become harder when resources are not available to help these spouses transition to other job and career opportunities while living in a new state or abroad.

(b) Multiple studies affirm unequivocally higher unemployment rates for military spouses than for civilian spouses. Underemployment is also a serious challenge for military spouses and their families. The lack of employment opportunities for military spouses create stress, influence a family's decision to stay in or leave the military, and is a factor that ultimately hurts military readiness, retention, and recruiting.

(c) Advances in technology and the economy have created more job prospects for military spouses on reassignment.

(2) The legislature intends to establish a military spouse employment initiative and increase both the hiring and retention of military spouses in the state workforce by using innovative workplace strategies, including the use of technology to support mobile workforce opportunities.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 73.16 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The department of veterans affairs, employment security department, and department of commerce shall consult local chambers of commerce, associate development organizations, and businesses to initiate a demonstration campaign to increase military spouse employment. This campaign may include partnerships with chambers of commerce that result in business owners sharing, with the local chamber of commerce, information on the number of military spouses employed and the local chambers of commerce providing this information to the department of veterans affairs.

(2) Participants in the campaign are encouraged to work with the Washington state military transition council and county veterans' advisory boards as defined in RCW 73.08.035.

(3) Funding for the campaign shall be established from existing resources.

(4) For the purposes of this section, "military spouse" means any person married or previously married to a military service member, irrespective of the length of the marriage, during the military service member's service in any branch of the United States armed forces as an active duty service member, reservist, or national guard member.

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

(1) The office shall develop a military spouse recruitment program that targets military spouses 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, the state military transition council, the veterans employee resource group, the employment security department, and other interested stakeholders. Program development must include, but is not limited to, identifying: (a) Public and private military spouse recruitment programs and ways those programs can be used in Washington; (b) barriers to state employment and opportunities to better utilize military spouses' experience; (c) opportunities within Washington state government employment for mobile work, telework, and other flexible work arrangements; and (d) the number of military spouses employed by the state of Washington.

(2) For the purposes of this section, "military spouse" has the same meaning as in section 2(4) of this act.

(3) Funding for the program must be established from existing resources.

(4) The office shall report to the legislature with a draft plan by January 1, 2020, that includes draft bill language if necessary.

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

(1) By January 31st of each year, state agencies employing one thousand or more people must submit the report described in subsection (2) of this section to the human resources director.

(2) The report must include the following information:

(a) The number of employees from the previous calendar year;

(b) The number of employees who are military spouses, as defined in section 2(4) of this act; and

(c) Employment opportunities within the agency that can be performed by agency staff who are physically located overseas or outside the state of Washington.

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