
HOUSE BILL 1102

State of Washington

69th Legislature

2025 Regular Session

By Representatives Shavers, Ryu, Leavitt, Callan, Simmons, Goodman, Wylie, Nance, Fosse, and Reeves

Prefiled 12/19/24. Read first time 01/13/25. Referred to Committee on Technology, Economic Development, & Veterans.

1 AN ACT Relating to increasing support and services for veterans;
2 amending RCW 43.60A.230 and 43.60A.235; adding a new section to
3 chapter 43.60A RCW; and creating a new section.

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

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds that veterans are
6 eligible for state and federal benefits, but may be unaware of those
7 benefits or the process to apply for them. Veterans service officers
8 serve a critical role in assisting veterans and their families with
9 identifying and applying for federal benefits, including health care,
10 service-connected disability, nonservice-connected pension,
11 employment, education, housing, burial, and survival benefits. The
12 federal department of veterans affairs provides over \$6.5 billion per
13 year in benefits to veterans in Washington. The average veteran
14 receiving service-connected disability compensation benefits receives
15 over \$1,700 per month.

16 The legislature further finds that nationwide, approximately 32
17 percent of veterans receive federal disability compensation.
18 Washington currently has approximately 530,000 resident veterans, but
19 only 158,000 veterans are receiving federal benefits. Currently,
20 veterans in 15 Washington counties receive benefits at or above the
21 national average, 21 counties are within 10 percent of the national

1 average, and three counties are more than 10 percent below the
2 national average.

3 Therefore, the legislature intends to expand the veterans service
4 officer program started in 2019 to increase the number of veterans
5 applying for and receiving federal benefits. The program's first
6 veterans service officer assisting veterans in the identification of
7 benefits and filing of claims increased the number of veterans
8 applying for benefits from 13 in the first year to 323 in the third
9 year, and from no annual disability payments to \$2,696,524 in federal
10 benefits each year. The Washington state department of veterans
11 affairs' September 30, 2024, veterans service officer program report
12 estimates the cost to expand the program is \$160,000 per year for
13 each additional county. The legislature intends to expand the program
14 by one to two veterans service officers per biennium beginning with
15 the counties with the lowest percentage of benefits received, until
16 all counties are at or above the national average.

17 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 43.60A
18 RCW to read as follows:

19 The department must support veterans by providing information
20 regarding available veterans services. Subject to the availability of
21 amounts appropriated from the veterans service officer fund for the
22 specific purposes provided in this section, the department must:

23 (1) Contact veterans within 90 days of receipt of a discharge
24 notice from the department of defense and provide information about
25 veterans benefits and services;

26 (2) Provide county-specific information on the department website
27 identifying services and resources available to veterans using
28 information provided to the department by county veterans assistance
29 programs and local branches of nationally recognized veterans service
30 organizations; and

31 (3) Beginning December 1, 2026, and every two years thereafter,
32 report to the governor and the appropriate standing committees of the
33 legislature regarding veterans services. The report must include, at
34 a minimum:

35 (a) The number of veterans residing in each county;

36 (b) The number and type of veterans services available in each
37 county;

38 (c) The number of veterans served in the reporting period by the
39 department, veterans service officer program, and counties

1 contracting with the department for veterans services, including the
2 number of veterans served who reside in an adjacent county;

3 (d) The number of claims filed in the reporting period by
4 veterans service organizations contracting with the department;

5 (e) The percentage of veterans served in the reporting period who
6 received service-related disability and nonservice-connected
7 veterans' pensions; and

8 (f) Identification of:

9 (i) Each county where the percentage of the veteran population
10 receiving service-related disability and nonservice-connected
11 veterans' pensions is below the national average; and

12 (ii) Each county that does not provide access to a veterans
13 service officer through the veterans' assistance program defined in
14 RCW 73.08.005, through a contract with the department, through the
15 veterans service officer program described in RCW 43.60A.230, or
16 directly through the department.

17 **Sec. 3.** RCW 43.60A.230 and 2019 c 223 s 1 are each amended to
18 read as follows:

19 (1) There is created in the department the veterans service
20 officer program. The purpose of the veterans service officer program
21 is to provide funding to underserved eligible counties to establish
22 and maintain a veterans service officer within the county. "Eligible
23 counties," for the purposes of this section, means counties (~~with a~~
24 ~~population of one hundred thousand or less~~) where the percentage of
25 the veteran population receiving federal disability or pension
26 compensation is below the national average.

27 (2) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated in the
28 veterans service officer fund under RCW 43.60A.235 for the specific
29 purposes provided in this section, the department must:

30 (a) Establish a process to educate local governments, veterans,
31 and those still serving in the national guard or armed forces reserve
32 of the veterans service officer program;

33 (b) Develop partnerships with local governments to assist in
34 establishing and maintaining local veterans service officers in
35 eligible counties who elect to have a veterans service officer; and

36 (c) Provide funding to support eligible counties in establishing
37 and maintaining local accredited veterans service officers. (~~Funding~~
38 ~~is provided on a first-come, first-served basis. Funding may only be~~
39 ~~provided to support the equivalent of one full-time veterans service~~

1 ~~officer per eligible county.)~~ The department shall prioritize
2 additional funding to eligible counties with the lowest percentage of
3 the veteran population receiving federal disability or pension
4 compensation, and then to eligible counties without a veterans
5 service officer.

6 (3) The application process for the veterans service officer
7 program must be prescribed as to manner and form by the department.

8 (4) The department may adopt rules necessary to implement this
9 section. The department shall include a requirement that any county
10 that participates in the veterans service officer program must allow
11 any veteran residing in an adjacent county access to the county's
12 veterans service officer.

13 (5) For purposes of this section, "veterans service officer"
14 means an accredited veterans service officer funded by the veterans
15 service officer fund created in RCW 43.60A.235.

16 **Sec. 4.** RCW 43.60A.235 and 2019 c 223 s 2 are each amended to
17 read as follows:

18 (1) There is created in the custody of the state treasurer an
19 account to be known as the veterans service officer fund. Revenues to
20 the fund consist of appropriations by the legislature, private
21 contributions, and all other sources deposited in the fund.

22 (2) Expenditures from the fund may only be used for the purposes
23 of the veterans service officer program under RCW 43.60A.230 and
24 section 2 of this act, including administrative expenses. Only the
25 director, or the director's designee, may authorize expenditures. The
26 account is subject to allotment procedures under chapter 43.88 RCW,
27 but an appropriation is not required for expenditures.

--- END ---