

SENATE BILL REPORT

2SHB 2754

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Government Operations & Elections, February 21, 2006

Title: An act relating to creation of the veterans innovations program.

Brief Description: Creating the veterans innovations program.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Morrell, Campbell, Green, Haigh, Appleton, Kilmer, Darneille, Cox, Ormsby, Haler, Chase, P. Sullivan, McCoy, Wallace, Sells, Serben, Curtis, Moeller, Blake, Cody, Kenney, Conway, Ericks, Clibborn, Kessler, Simpson and Linville).

Brief History: Passed House: 2/07/06, 98-0.

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Elections: 2/21/06 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Kastama, Chair; Berkey, Vice Chair; Roach, Ranking Minority Member; Benton, Fairley, Haugen, Kline, Mulliken and Pridemore.

Staff: Cindy Fazio (786-7405)

Background: The Department of Veterans Affairs provides a variety of services to veterans, including assistance with finding employment, submitting entitlement claims, managing long-term health care, obtaining counseling for post-traumatic stress syndrome, and addressing a variety of other needs specific to veterans.

Summary of Bill: The Veterans Innovations Program (VIP) is created within the Department of Veterans Affairs (Department). The purpose of the VIP is to provide additional assistance to veterans who have returned to their families and communities after serving in recent military action. Two separate programs are created within the VIP: the Defenders' Fund Program and the Competitive Grant Program.

The Defenders' Fund Program is administered by the Department, and allows members of the National Guard and reservists who served in Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, or Operation Noble Eagle, to receive a one-time financial hardship grant of no more than \$500 related to employment, education, housing, and health care.

The Competitive Grant Program is created to fund innovative initiatives to provide crisis and emergency relief, education, training, and employment assistance to veterans and their families in their communities. A seven-member citizen board is created to administer the program. The board members are appointed by the Governor and must have recognized experience in serving veterans and their families in the areas targeted by the program. The

board will report to the Legislature and joint committee on veterans and military affairs on January 1, 2007, regarding the implementation of this act.

The Veterans Innovations Program Account (Account) is created in the State Treasury. The Department may receive gifts, grants, or endowments from public or private sources for purposes of the defender's or competitive grant programs.

The VIP is terminated on June 30, 2016.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Port Orchard is very active in supporting its military families. During times of guard deployment, we have seen the impact on the families in our community. There is a rise in family problems. The families need emergency money and counseling, for example. We raise money to meet these needs. This is an example of community support. The guard is a different organization now. They are no longer weekend warriors, and the families are vulnerable. This bill would encourage communities to help these families. If the guard recruits an individual with problems, that individual will either turn a new leaf, which is more common, or he or she will be thrown out. I have seen many really wonderful people who started out with some problems. Under the Defenders Fund part of the program, military members can get immediate financial help and the community can contribute to that. The VA and DVA are wonderful organizations that do a lot to help, but this part will encourage the local communities where these folks live to participate in the support of the families.

Testimony Against: None.

Who Testified: PRO: Larry Sequest, Port Orchard Chamber of Commerce Military Commission; Gary "Frosty" Hulse, Veterans Legislative Coalition.