

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5112

As Reported by House Committee On: Appropriations

Title: An act relating to veterans of the Afghanistan conflict and the Persian Gulf War II.

Brief Description: Providing public employment retirement credits and education fee waivers for veterans of the Afghanistan conflict and the Persian Gulf War II.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education (originally sponsored by Senators Shin, Schmidt, Rockefeller, Rasmussen, Kline, Sheldon, Keiser, Doumit, Berkey, Kastama, Haugen, McAuliffe, Franklin, Johnson, Kohl-Welles, Benson and Oke).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Appropriations: 3/24/05 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill (As Amended by House Committee)

- Adds service in southern or central Asia as part of Operation Enduring Freedom and service in the Persian Gulf as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom to the list of conflicts that qualify a member of the Public Employees' Retirement System Plan 1 for non-interruptive military service credit.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 28 members: Representatives Sommers, Chair; Fromhold, Vice Chair; Alexander, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; McDonald, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Armstrong, Bailey, Buri, Clements, Cody, Conway, Darneille, Dunshee, Grant, Haigh, Hinkle, Hunter, Kenney, Kessler, Linville, McDermott, McIntire, Miloscia, Pearson, Priest, Schual-Berke, Talcott and Walsh.

Staff: David Pringle (786-7310).

Background:

All of Washington's state-sponsored retirement systems provide credit for interruptive military service, but only two plans provide military service credit for non-interruptive military service. Non-interruptive military service credit applies to military service rendered before or after joining the Public Employees' Retirement System Plan 1 (PERS 1) or the Washington

State Patrol Retirement System Plan 1 for up to five years of credit after 25 years of plan membership.

While interruptive military service credit is required to be offered by all retirement plans by federal law, non-interruptive military service is not. The conflicts and types of military service credit that qualify a member of PERS 1 as a veteran for non-interruptive service credit are specifically listed in state law.

An additional state benefit available to veterans is eligibility for tuition and fee waivers from the public baccalaureate institutions and community colleges. The state higher education institutions are granted the authority by the Legislature to waive all or a portion of tuition and fees for veterans. All waiver programs are permissive for the institutions. Currently, there are three separate statutes that provide tuition waiver authority for veterans.

Veterans of the first Persian Gulf War may be exempted from any increase in student tuition or fees that occurred after the 1990-91 academic year. To qualify for the exemption, the veteran must be a resident student and must have served in the Persian Gulf combat zone as designated by executive order of the President of the United States during 1991.

Veterans of the Vietnam conflict are eligible for a waiver of tuition increases that have occurred since October 1977. To qualify for the waiver the veteran must be a resident student and must have been on active federal service in the armed forces during the period August 5, 1964, through May 7, 1975.

A veteran enrolled in an institution on or before 1977, including veterans of both World Wars and the Korean conflict, is also eligible under statute for a full or partial tuition waiver if he or she is no longer eligible for federal education or vocational benefits.

Summary of Amended Bill:

Military service in southern or central Asia as part of Operation Enduring Freedom and service in the Persian Gulf as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom are added to the list of conflicts which qualify a member of PERS 1 for non-interruptive military service credit. To qualify for service in these categories, a member of PERS 1 must be awarded the related campaign badge or medal.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill:

The Substitute Senate Bill also authorized higher education institutions to exempt veterans of the Afghanistan and second Persian Gulf combat zones from all or a portion of the increases in tuition and fees that have occurred since the time of the conflict in which the veteran served.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: Veterans provide a valuable service to our country and should be granted the provision of the bill. This is a small sacrifice in comparison to the service veterans provide.

(With concerns on substitute bill) We support tuition waivers for all veterans, but believe there is a more effective legislative vehicle to accomplish this goal. SHB 1174 is a better mechanism. It brings all veteran-related tuition waivers into a single piece of legislation and waives them consistently at the colleges.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Senator Shin, prime sponsor.

(With concerns on substitute bill) Chris Reykdal, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.