

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SHB 1189

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As Reported By Senate Committee On:  
Government Operations & Elections, March 31, 2005

**Title:** An act relating to veterans' relief.

**Brief Description:** Providing relief for indigent veterans and their families.

**Sponsors:** House Committee on Local Government (originally sponsored by Representatives Moeller, Bailey, McCoy, Armstrong, Williams, Newhouse, Fromhold, Springer, Ericks, Flannigan, Curtis, Cody, Condotta, Appleton, Hinkle, Morrell, Campbell, Pearson, Chase, Dickerson, Linville, Woods, Kenney, O'Brien, Conway, Lantz, Sells, Kagi, Ormsby, Haigh, Upthegrove, Hasegawa and Kilmer).

**Brief History:** Passed House: 3/09/05, 90-6.

**Committee Activity:** Government Operations & Elections: 3/24/05, 3/31/05 [DPA].

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

**Majority Report:** Do pass as amended.

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

**Staff:** Cindy Fazio (786-7405)

**Background:** The legislative authority of a county with a city, town or precinct must provide funds for the relief of veterans and family members. The funds may only be drawn upon by certain officials of national veterans' organizations. Veteran, for the purposes of this relief provision, is defined, in part, to include persons who, at the time they seek specific benefits, have received an honorable discharge, or a discharge for physical reasons with an honorable record, and who have served in specified capacities.

County legislative authorities must levy a tax for the purpose of creating the veteran's assistance fund for the relief of qualifying veterans and their indigent wives, husbands, widows, widowers and minor children if deceased. The levy rate is generally not to be less than one and one-eighth cents per \$1,000 of assessed value against taxable property of the county, but may not exceed twenty-seven cents per \$1,000 of assessed value.

**Summary of Amended Bill:** Each county legislative authority must establish a veterans' assistance program to address the relief needs of indigent veterans and their families. The county legislative authority must consult with and solicit recommendations from a veterans' advisory board to determine the appropriate services needed. A majority of the board members of the advisory board must be members from national veterans' service organizations, and any board member must be a veteran. County legislative authorities may authorize other entities to administer veterans' assistance programs through grants, contracts,

or interlocal agreements. Counties may authorize the continued operation of veterans' relief or assistance programs existing on January 1, 2005.

The legislative authority of each county must designate a proper authority to be responsible, at county expense, for the burial or cremation of any qualifying deceased indigent veteran or family member who died without leaving sufficient means to defray funeral expenses. The burial or cremation may not exceed the limit established by the county nor be less than \$300. Relatives or friends of the deceased may be the recipients of the defrayal funds from the county auditor or qualifying chief financial officer if specified requirements are met.

The veterans' assistance fund may only be used for:

- authorized veterans' assistance programs;
- the burial or cremation of a qualifying veteran or family member; and
- the direct and indirect costs incurred in the administration of the fund.

The Department of Social and Health Services must exempt payments provided from veterans' assistance programs when determining a veteran's eligibility for public assistance.

An eligibility criteria for a separate statutory definition of "veteran" is modified. A 180-day service requirement for qualifying persons called into federal service through a presidential call up is deleted.

**Amended Bill Compared to Bill Referred to Committee:** The section amending the definition of a veteran, Sec. 7, is removed, and the necessary technical changes are made.

**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:** This legislation allows the counties more flexibility in meeting veterans' needs. We have provided a great opportunity for improvement without a need for state money. This legislation is three years in coming and is well written and ready to go. The language puts veterans in control of helping veterans. The marines support this legislation and the help is past due.

**Testimony Against:** This bill creates a potential for abuse by allowing access to the veteran's assistance fund by private entities. Fund monies will end up going to salaries of these entities and not to veterans. Also, the entities will create a resource, designate a minimal amount for veterans to gain access to the money, then use the resource for other money-making purposes. This does not benefit veterans. County officials already have the authority they need to benefit veterans. Only Clark county supports this expansion, at least 13 other counties do not. Additionally, when excess money occurs in the fund, we do not see a reduction in property taxes to balance that. Finally, certain existing programs are grandfathered in. They were not allowable to begin with; now they would be allowed.

**Who Testified:** PRO: Representative Moeller, prime sponsor; Joel Estey, County Veteran's Coalition; Tim Podhora, County Veteran's Coalition-Clark County; Sharon Wylie, Clark

County; Skip Dreps, Paralyzed Veterans of America; John Stofiel, Marine Corps League; Dennis Primoli, Veteran's Legislative Coalition.

CON: Roger Jarman, citizen.