

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1571

As Passed House:
March 1, 2017

Title: An act relating to creating a community care and supportive services program for veterans.

Brief Description: Creating a community care and supportive services program for veterans.

Sponsors: Representatives Reeves, Muri, Ryu, Kilduff, Sawyer, Steele, Macri, Orwall, Tharinger, Chapman, Stanford, Doglio, Fey, Hudgins, Stonier, Frame, Kloba, Springer, J. Walsh, McBride, Ortiz-Self, Riccelli and Slatter.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Community Development, Housing & Tribal Affairs: 2/2/17, 2/7/17 [DP];
Appropriations: 2/20/17, 2/21/17 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/1/17, 98-0.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the Department of Veterans Affairs to initiate a pilot program to assist veterans in rural and remote areas with access to benefits and services.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, HOUSING & TRIBAL AFFAIRS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Ryu, Chair; Macri, Vice Chair; McCabe, Ranking Minority Member; Barkis, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Jenkin, Reeves and Sawyer.

Staff: Sean Flynn (786-7124).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 33 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Robinson, Vice Chair; Chandler, Ranking Minority Member; MacEwen, Assistant Ranking

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Minority Member; Stokesbary, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Buys, Calder, Cody, Condotta, Fitzgibbon, Haler, Hansen, Harris, Hudgins, Jinkins, Kagi, Lytton, Manweller, Nealey, Pettigrew, Pollet, Sawyer, Schmick, Senn, Springer, Stanford, Sullivan, Taylor, Tharinger, Vick, Volz and Wilcox.

Staff: Linda Merelle (786-7092).

Background:

The federal government provides military veterans with a variety of federal benefits including: disability compensation; education and training; employment services; health care; home loans; life insurance; and pensions. The federal Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) administers many of these benefit programs and provides resources for veterans to access and obtain these benefits.

The Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) administers veterans' benefits provided by the state. Some of these benefit programs include the Veterans Assistance Program, Veterans Innovations Program, State Veterans Homes, and several housing assistance programs.

Each county is authorized to establish a veterans assistance program (VAP) to provide services for indigent veterans and their families. Counties have authority to levy a special tax that provides revenue for the VAP through a veterans' assistance fund. The county may delegate administration of the VAP to another entity through a grant, contract, or interlocal agreement. The county must establish a veterans advisory board to provide recommendations on the VAP.

Summary of Bill:

The DVA must select a county VAP or community partner to administer a community care and supportive services pilot program in one county. The county program must be selected by January 1, 2018. A community partner includes any nationally recognized veterans' service group with a chapter in the state, or other established organization that provides veteran services.

The pilot program must provide assistance for veterans and their families who reside in a rural or remote area of the state. The program must provide assistance to increase access to federal veterans benefits, reintegration services, and other public services. Such assistance may include:

- coordinating with the federal VA and other federal agencies in obtaining health care, employment, educational, vocational, rehabilitation services;
- coordinating with other public agencies in obtaining services related to mental health, substance abuse, counseling, domestic violence, family services, and transportation; and
- providing direct services by the county or community partner that are otherwise unavailable to address the veterans' particular needs.

The selection of the program administrator should be assessed based on the access to veteran resources in the county, the management capabilities of the VAP or community partner, and the projected ability of the program to increase access to services for veterans in the county. By December 1, 2019, the DVA must prepare and submit a report to the Legislature that evaluates the pilot program and makes recommendations whether the program should be continued or expanded. The report must include the number of persons served, the types of outreach and referrals made, and the availability of resources within the county.

The act is null and void if specific funding is not provided by the beginning of the 2017-19 biennium.

The pilot program expires on July 1, 2020.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed. However, the bill is null and void unless funded in the budget.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Community Development, Housing & Tribal Affairs):

(In support) This bill will help to coordinate veteran services and ensure that veterans have access to earned service benefits.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) There are 45 percent of veterans living in rural areas that are far away from services, making those services readily accessible. Many of those veterans are unaware of those services or do not have the ability to reach them. By increasing access to services and benefits using the DVA's expertise with federal and local veteran-related services, those benefits and services will be better utilized. Connecting veterans to such resources will also save other limited resources rural veterans are using in the absence of the their veterans' services.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Appropriations):

(In support) The bill addresses veterans in rural areas, which includes parts of King County. One tough thing in research is finding a narrow enough subject, and the pilot project in this bill is narrow enough to conduct a study to get a return on investment.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying (Community Development, Housing & Tribal Affairs): (In support) Representative Reeves, prime sponsor.

(Other) Alfie Alvarado, Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs.

Persons Testifying (Appropriations): Deryl McCarty, Veterans Legislative Coalition; and Jerry Fugich, Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Community Development, Housing & Tribal Affairs): None.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Appropriations): None.