

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 5849

As Passed House - Amended:
April 11, 2017

Title: An act relating to veterans' services.

Brief Description: Addressing the need for veterans' services.

Sponsors: Senators Angel, Bailey, Rolfes, Braun, Brown, Sheldon, Pearson, Becker, Fortunato, Wilson, Palumbo, O'Ban, Warnick and Conway.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Community Development, Housing & Tribal Affairs: 3/14/17, 3/23/17 [DP];
Appropriations: 4/1/17, 4/4/17 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House - Amended: 4/11/17, 98-0.

**Brief Summary of Bill
(As Amended by House)**

- Requires the Office of Financial Management to develop a military recruitment program that provides credit for military veterans' knowledge, skills, and leadership abilities.
- Requires the state Department of Veterans Affairs to offer, to the extent funding is available, training and support for veterans interested in providing peer-to-peer support for other veterans.

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

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 32 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Robinson, Vice Chair; Chandler, Ranking Minority Member; MacEwen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Stokesbary, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Buys, 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 state offers various programs to assist with veteran employment opportunities. For example, veterans receive a preference in state and county employment, including a scoring bonus on any competitive employment and promotion examinations. A private employer may receive a tax credit for hiring an unemployed veteran. Certain business and health professions must accept military training or experience towards licensing or certification requirements if the training and experience is substantially equivalent to the state licensing standards.

In 2013 the Governor created the Washington State Military Transition Council (Council) to develop innovative ideas to increase veteran employment opportunities by connecting state agencies with other governmental entities, private and nonprofit organizations, as well as the Department of Defense. The Director of the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) serves as the chair of the Council.

The 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. The DVA provides certain services for military members and their families related to deployment and war-related conditions. Specifically, such services include direct treatment services to war-affected veterans who served in Vietnam and the Middle East, training programs for primary care professionals on war-related stress and trauma, counseling and peer-support networks for families of deployed military members, and referrals to veterans' families for mental health providers.

Summary of Bill:

The Office of Financial Management (OFM) must develop a recruitment program for veterans that provides credit for knowledge, skills, and leadership abilities. The OFM must consult with the DVA, the Department of Enterprise Services, the Council, the Veterans Employee Resource Group, and the stakeholders in developing the program. The program must identify and connect with existing public and private military recruitment programs, develop a system to provide veterans with experience credit for state job classes with similar military jobs, and identify better ways to utilize veterans' experiences. The OFM must report to the Legislature by January 1, 2018, with a draft plan of the military recruitment program, including draft bill language if necessary.

The DVA must offer, to the extent funding is available, training and support for volunteers interested in providing peer-to-peer support for other veterans. The DVA must report to the Legislature by the end of 2018 on the effectiveness of the peer-to-peer support program. Certain DVA services for war-related conditions are changed to reference "combat-related services."

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

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

(In support) The peer-to-peer network system for veterans is modeled on a successful Texas program. The recruitment program will be used to align public employment opportunities with the valuable military expertise and leadership skills gained in the military. It also supports the state's efforts to be the employer of choice for veterans.

(Opposed) None.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Appropriations):

(In support) The peer-to-peer counseling program proposed in this legislation is modeled after a program in Texas. Training and peer ethics are a very important component of the program. The Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) would be able to capitalize on existing counseling services for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder. The peer-to-peer network would help connect more veterans to the counseling that they need, and the DVA has requested funding to increase the number of counselors for places where it does not have contracted counseling services.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying (Community Development, Housing & Tribal Affairs): Senator Angel, prime sponsor; and Alfie Alvarado, Washington Department of Veterans Affairs.

Persons Testifying (Appropriations): Heidi Audette, Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs.

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

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