
**Housing, Community Development &
Veterans Committee**

HB 1448

Brief Description: Creating the veterans service officer program.

Sponsors: Representatives Maycumber, Chapman, Lovick, Gildon, Reeves, Volz, Steele, Kilduff, Mosbrucker, Pettigrew, Boehnke, McCaslin, Macri, Irwin, Corry, Klippert, MacEwen, Riccelli, Eslick, Leavitt, Dye, Ryu, Smith, Stokesbary, Chambers, DeBolt, Slatter, Jenkin, Barkis, Cody, Schmick, Kretz, Tharinger, Van Werven, Orwall, Sells, Sutherland, Stanford, Ormsby and Jinkins.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates the Veterans Service Officer Program to provide funding for counties to establish veterans service officers.

Hearing Date: 1/30/19

Staff: Serena Dolly (786-7150).

Background:

Veterans Service Officers (VSOs) assist veterans and their families with claims for federal veterans benefits. VSOs may work for the state, a county, and tribal government or a private organization. In some counties, VSOs are funded through local Veterans Assistance Programs, which are established to provide relief and assistance to indigent veterans. County Veterans Assistance Programs receive funding through a portion of the county's regular property tax levy.

In order for a VSO to represent a veteran in his or her benefits claims, the VSO must undergo a formal application and training process and be accredited by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The Washington Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) facilitates the accreditation process for VSOs and currently assists local governments and organizations funding their own VSOs in this process.

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.

Summary of Bill:

The Veterans Service Officer Program (Program) is created within the WDVA to provide funding for underserved counties to establish a Veterans Service Officer. Underserved counties are defined as those with populations of 100,000 or less.

Subject to the availability of appropriated funds, the WDVA is required to:

- educate local governments, veterans, and members of the National Guard or Armed Forces Reserves about the program;
- develop partnerships with and provide funding to counties establishing local accredited veterans service officers; and
- develop an application process for the program.

The Veterans Service Officer Fund is created in the custody of the State Treasurer. Revenues to the fund may consist of appropriations by the Legislature, private contributions, and other deposits. Funds are awarded to counties on a first-come basis.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 25, 2019.

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