

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 5428

As Passed Senate, March 7, 2019

Title: An act relating to veterans' mental health services at institutions of higher education.

Brief Description: Concerning veterans' mental health services at institutions of higher education.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Higher Education & Workforce Development (originally sponsored by Senators Wilson, L., Palumbo, Becker, Brown, Wagoner, Warnick, Nguyen and Zeiger).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 1/31/19, 2/05/19 [DPS-WM].

Ways & Means: 2/14/19, 2/25/19 [DPS (HEWD)].

Floor Activity:

Passed Senate: 3/07/19, 48-0.

Brief Summary of First Substitute Bill

- Requires public baccalaureate institutions to each employ a full-time mental health counselor with experience and training related to working with active members of the military or military veterans.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5428 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Palumbo, Chair; Randall, Vice Chair; Holy, Ranking Member; Brown, Liias and Wellman.

Staff: Kellee Gunn (786-7429)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: Do pass.

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.

Signed by Senators Rolfes, Chair; Frockt, Vice Chair, Operating, Capital Lead; Mullet, Capital Budget Cabinet; Braun, Ranking Member; Brown, Assistant Ranking Member, Operating; Honeyford, Assistant Ranking Member, Capital; Bailey, Becker, Billig, Carlyle, Conway, Darneille, Hasegawa, Hunt, Keiser, Liias, Palumbo, Pedersen, Rivers, Schoesler, Van De Wege, Wagoner, Warnick and Wilson, L..

Staff: Daniel Masterson (786-7454)

Background: Veteran Supportive Campuses Certificate Program. In 2009, the Governor and state agencies jointly signed a Partners for Veteran Supportive Campuses Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to support veteran-related education goals. On November 21, 2014, the Governor and state agencies signed an updated version of the MOU.

Under the MOU, college campuses, including community and technical colleges, may apply for a Partner for Veteran Supportive Campus Certificate. The certificate acknowledges the schools' commitment to support post-secondary education for veterans.

Mental Health Counselors. A mental health counselor is someone who applies principles of human development, learning theory, psychotherapy, group dynamics and etiology of mental illness and dysfunction behavior to individuals, families, groups, or organizations, for the purpose of treating mental disorders and promoting optimal mental health functionality. Mental health counselors must have a master's or doctoral level degree in mental health counseling, and have completed state examination requirements and a minimum of 36 months of full-time supervised counseling.

Summary of First Substitute Bill: Subject to appropriation, the public baccalaureates must each employ a full-time mental health counselor who has experience and training specifically related to working with active members of the military or military veterans. The mental health counselor shall prioritize working with student veterans. Each institution's veteran's resource center must make available information on mental health services offered by other agencies. The counselor must be accessible through, but not necessarily in, the institution's veterans resource center.

Appropriation: The bill contains a section or sections to limit implementation to the availability of amounts appropriated for that specific purpose.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill (Higher Education & Workforce Development): *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* PRO: This bill has passed off the Senate floor before with full support. Student veterans have unique issues. The veterans' administration has the ability to do this, but there is a time issue. These student veterans cannot wait 30 days to get help. This bill provides a counselor at every school. There are thousands of veterans attending higher education in this

state. Mental health resources are generally inadequate on our campuses. Last year, due to inadequate state funding, the UW counseling center had to dip into S&A fees to secure a counselor for the Office of Student Vet Life. Washington has one of the highest of unmet needs of mental health in the country. The state should start funding this position at UW, and fund it at all schools statewide because a student veteran's mental health should not depend on what school they attend. Central Washington University (CWU) has the highest number of veterans of any public comprehensive four-year university in the United States. The past three years, there has been a 240 percent increase of students asking for mental health services at CWU. The funding model right now is not sustainable in relationship to the veterans who need help. Having a counselor available on all campuses improves overall mental health.

OTHER: The health impact review found evidence that if the institutions of higher education provide counselors it would increase access to and the use of mental health services. Increasing access to these services would improve mental health outcomes for veterans overall and decrease health disparities.

Persons Testifying (Higher Education & Workforce Development): PRO: Senator Lynda Wilson, Prime Sponsor; Kelsey Hood, Vice President of External Affairs for University of Washington Graduate & Professional Student Senate; Lukas Garcia, Director of Legislative Affairs for Associated Students of the University of Washington Seattle; Ted Wicorek, Veterans Legislative Coalition; Samantha Powers, University of Washington; Ying Ye, University of Washington; Charles Adkins, Director of Legislative Affairs, Geoduck Student Union of the Evergreen State College; Antonio Sanchez, Central Washington University.

OTHER: Lindsay Herendeen, State Board of Health.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Higher Education & Workforce Development): No one.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on First Substitute (Ways & Means): PRO: There are a large number of students that are veterans, about 3500 students, and the largest majority are attending University of Washington. They determined last year that this was important enough that they used student activities fees to cover half of the salary of the University of Washington's counselor, although that's not going to be sustainable and that's not what the student activity fees are supposed to be used for. But, it is very much needed. At the Evergreen State College a full 15 percent, or about 480 students at our college, currently are either active duty veterans or are retired members of our military. Evergreen right now is already overburdened with our counseling services. Veterans are commonly our students that need the most help when it comes to mental health. Our counseling services just are not equipped to deal with the unique needs of student veterans.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Senator Lynda Wilson, Prime Sponsor.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Charles Adkins, Director of Legislative Affairs, Geoduck Student Union.