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**SENATE BILL 5358**

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**State of Washington 68th Legislature 2023 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Gildon, Nobles, Conway, Holy, Lovelett, Nguyen, Randall, Torres, Wagoner, Wellman, C. Wilson, and L. Wilson

AN ACT Relating to expanding veterans' services and programs; amending RCW 43.60A.101; adding new sections to chapter 43.60A RCW; creating a new section; and providing expiration dates.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature finds that it is vital for veterans in their return to our communities to have adequate community supports. Local programs that connect veterans with their federal benefits and with other veterans for peer support are crucial components of that structure. It is the intent of the legislature through this act to enhance state funding of these programs to ensure they are robust and widely available throughout the state.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 43.60A RCW to read as follows:

(1) By September 30, 2024, the department must submit a report to the legislature on the veterans service officer program authorized in RCW 43.60A.230 to determine the effectiveness of the program in meeting the needs of veterans in the state. The report must include the number of veterans receiving services from the program, the location of such services, and an analysis of areas of the state that are lacking these services. The report must also include recommendations for how to phase in an expansion of these services to these areas.

(2) This section expires December 31, 2024.

**Sec.**  RCW 43.60A.101 and 2017 c 192 s 5 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) By ((~~December 31, 2018~~)) September 30, 2024, the department ((~~of veterans affairs~~)) must submit a report to the legislature on the veteran peer-to-peer training and support program authorized in RCW 43.60A.100 to determine the effectiveness of the program in meeting the needs of veterans in the state. The report must include the number of veterans receiving peer-to-peer support and the location of such support services; the number of veterans trained through the program to provide peer-to-peer support; and the types of training and support services provided by the program. The report must also include an analysis of ((~~peer-to-peer training and support programs developed by other states, as well as in the private and nonprofit sectors, in order to evaluate best practices for implementing and managing the veteran peer-to-peer training and support program authorized in RCW 43.60A.100~~)) areas of the state that do not have these support services and are in need of these services, including recommendations for how to phase in an expansion of these services to these areas.

(2) This section expires December 31, 2024.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 43.60A RCW to read as follows:

It is the intent of the legislature to double state appropriations for veterans service officer and peer mentoring programs with this act. As a result, and subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the department shall provide grants to counties of the state in order to develop or expand veterans service officer programs, peer-to-peer support programs, and other services and programs to assist veterans in areas where these programs and services are needed. In distributing these grants, the department must prioritize counties with smaller populations and counties that are below the national average in the percentage of veterans receiving federal disability or pension compensation.

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