

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5361

As of January 24, 2008

Title: An act relating to the performance of Taps at veterans' funerals.

Brief Description: Providing for the live performance of Taps at veterans' funerals.

Sponsors: Senators Jacobsen and Shin.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Elections: 1/24/08.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Staff: Cindy Calderon (786-7784)

Background: The Department of Defense is required to provide military honors to all eligible veterans at no charge to families. The Secretary of Defense must ensure that an honors detail is provided at a veteran's funeral. The detail consists of at least two armed force members. The law requires, at a minimum, the folding and presenting of the U.S. flag to the next of kin and the playing of taps by a live bugler, if available, or through a recording.

Members of the Ready Reserve may be ordered to perform honors duty at a veteran's funeral. The Ready Reserve is comprised of military members of the Reserve and National Guard. The Army National Guard, or the Air National Guard may be ordered to perform honors duty under specific conditions.

Washington defines a veteran as an individual who has received an honorable discharge or a medical discharge with an honorable record who has served in any of the following capacities: any branch of the armed forces; the women's air forces service pilots; the armed force reserves, national guard or coast guard for at least 180 days; as a civil service crew member from December 7, 1941, through December 31, 1946; as a member of the Philippine armed forces from December 7, 1941, through August 15, 1945; or as a documented merchant mariner from both June 25, 1950, through July 27, 1953 and August 5, 1964, through May 7, 1995.

Summary of Bill: Veterans are entitled to a live performance of Taps without cost to the veteran or family. The Washington State Arts Commission must identify qualified trumpeters and maintain a list. The state Department of Veterans Affairs will pay a trumpeter one hundred dollars per performance.

Appropriation: None.

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.

Fiscal Note: Available. Requested on January 15, 2008.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: I was surprised by the fiscal costs; I did not know there was 14,000 veteran funerals a month. I look at it like this, this is the last time we are going to pay respect to these individuals and it means a lot to their families. The inspiration for this bill comes from a sixteen-year old girl out of Indiana who thought every veteran deserved a live performance of taps. So she taught herself how to play. I think everyone deserves that over a boom box. I have served 21 & half; years as a musician in the Marine Corps and have performed at more funerals than I could count. I assure this committee that a live performance outweighs the audio mated bugle and boom box we are seeing today. The Seattle Symphony was providing sound tracks for a children's' video game that was being produced by George Lucas; I asked why? George Lucas said his concern was to put the human element back into an otherwise digitized world. I feel the same for taps. This illustrates how and why taps should be performed by a live person. The state Department of Veteran's Affairs has shown an interest in running this program. Maybe we should turn this bill into a study bill and High School bands step up and do this. The Military Department performs about 300 funerals a month and 40 percent of them have a live bugler. Out of the 12,000 sample, probably half are taken care of by the military and national guard for retirees. If under this great idea, you give me the authority to do so, I will work and bring back a plan that makes sense.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Jacobsen, prime sponsor; CAPT (Ret) Andrew Omdahl, Marine Corps; John E. Lee, Director, Washington Department of Veterans' Affairs.