

SENATE BILL REPORT

EHB 2534

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Government Operations & Security, February 22, 2016

Title: An act relating to creating a community care and supportive services program for veterans.

Brief Description: Creating a community care and supportive services program for veterans.

Sponsors: Representatives Kilduff, Orwall, Muri, McCabe, Appleton, Zeiger, Frame, McBride, Sells and Bergquist.

Brief History: Passed House: 2/17/16, 98-0.

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Security: 2/22/16, 2/22/16 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & SECURITY

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Roach, Chair; Pearson, Vice Chair; Habib, McCoy and Takko.

Staff: Karen Epps (786-7424)

Background: The federal government provides military veterans with a variety of federal benefits including: disability compensation; education and training; employment services; health care; home loans; life insurance; and pensions. The federal Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) administers many of these benefit programs and provides resources for veterans to access and obtain these benefits.

The Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) administers veterans' benefits provided by the state. Some of these benefit programs include: the Veterans' Assistance Program; the Veterans Innovations Program; the state veterans homes; homeless veterans services and transitional housing; home loans; and home ownership.

Each county is authorized to establish a Veterans' Assistance Program (VAP) to provide services for indigent veterans and their families. Counties have authority to levy a special tax that provides revenue for the VAP through a Veterans' Assistance Fund. The county may delegate administration of the VAP to another entity through a grant, contract, or interlocal agreement. The county must establish a Veterans Advisory Board to provide recommendations on the VAP.

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 DVA must select a county VAP or community partner to administer a community care and supportive services pilot program in one county. The DVA must select the county VAP or community partner by January 1, 2017. A community partner includes any nationally recognized veterans service group with a chapter in the state or other established organization that provides veteran services. The selection of the county VAP or community partner to pilot a community care and supportive services program should be based upon:

- the current ability of county veteran residents to access federal veterans' benefits and reintegration services and other public services;
- the capability of the county VAP or community partner to successfully manage the pilot program; and
- the projected outcome of success that the pilot program will be able to increase access for veterans to federal veterans' benefits and other public service programs.

The pilot program must provide assistance for veterans and their families who reside in a rural or remote area of the state that does not have adequate access to federal veterans' benefits, reintegration services, and other public services. Such assistance may include:

- coordinating with the federal VA and other federal agencies in obtaining health care, employment, educational, vocational, rehabilitation, and reintegration services;
- coordinating with other public agencies in obtaining services related to mental health, substance abuse, counseling, domestic violence, family services, and transportation;
- providing direct services by the county or community partner that are otherwise unavailable to address the veterans' particular needs.

The selection of the program administrator should be assessed based on the access to veteran resources in the county, the management capabilities of the VAP or community partner, and the projected ability of the program to increase access to services for veterans in the county.

By December 1, 2018, the DVA must prepare and submit a report to the Legislature that evaluates the pilot program and makes recommendations whether the program should be continued or expanded. The report must include the number of persons served, the number and types of referrals made, the types of outreach conducted, and the availability of resources within the county. The pilot program expires on July 1, 2019.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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: Washington is a proud military state, the 6th most populous in the nation. Washington has well over half a million veterans, but one in five veterans live in small towns and rural areas. Those veterans should not have to trek to Tacoma, Seattle, or Spokane to get services that they are entitled. This is an outstanding bill.

OTHER: Many of our veterans served their country and then moved to very remote parts of our state. In many cases, these veterans are unaware of the services that they may be eligible for. With a pilot program such as this, the DVA can partner with a rural community and create those community connections and build the bridges that will get veterans connected to the services that they earned through their military service.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Kilduff, prime sponsor; Ted Wicorek, Veterans Legislative Coalition.

OTHER: Heidi Audette, WA State Department of Veterans Affairs.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.