

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESB 6626

As Passed House - Amended:

March 5, 2020

Title: An act relating to creating the position of military spouse liaison.

Brief Description: Creating the position of military spouse liaison.

Sponsors: Senators Conway, O'Ban, Hunt, Zeiger, Hobbs, Becker, Randall, Short, Brown and Wagoner.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Housing, Community Development & Veterans: 2/28/20 [DPA].

Floor Activity:

Passed House - Amended: 3/5/20, 97-0.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Bill (As Amended by House)

- Creates the position of the military spouse liaison within the Department of Veterans Affairs.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & VETERANS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Ryu, Chair; Morgan, Vice Chair; Gildon, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Barkis, Frame, Leavitt and Ramel.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Jenkin, Ranking Minority Member.

Staff: Cassie Jones (786-7303).

Background:

The Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) is a state agency created in 1975. The powers and duties of the DVA include cooperating with local governments and the federal

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government, particularly regarding participation in federal grants-in-aid programs relating to veterans and veterans affairs. The DVA provides many services to veterans and their families, including medical care, assistance with claims for benefits, estate management, counseling, and financial assistance. The DVA assists veterans with education, training, and employment.

Summary of Amended Bill:

The position of military spouse liaison (liaison) is created within the DVA. The duties of the liaison include, but are not limited to:

- conducting outreach to and advocating on behalf of military spouses in Washington;
- providing assistance and information to military spouses seeking professional licenses and credentials or other employment in Washington;
- coordinating research on issues facing military spouses and creating informational materials to assist military spouses and their families;
- examining barriers and providing recommendations to assist spouses in accessing high-quality child care and developing resources in coordination with military installations and the Department of Children, Youth, and Families to increase access to high-quality child care for military families; and
- developing, in coordination with the Employment Security Department and employers, a common form for military spouses to complete highlighting specific skills, education, and training to help spouses find meaningful employment in relevant economic sectors.

The liaison is encouraged to periodically report on the work of the liaison to the relevant committees of the Legislature and the Joint Committee on Veterans' and Military Affairs and participate in policy development related to military spouses.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Washington already has an expedited licensing process for military spouses in health care professions. The expedited process takes about two weeks for the applicants to get their licenses. Military spouses report that obtaining a nursing license in Washington is easy and quick under the expedited process. There are only about 200 applicants seeking a license through the expedited process for military spouses. Waiving licensing fees is one way to help military spouses. The Department of Defense already has funds available to pay the licensing fees. This bill is trying to solve a problem that does not exist. There are several concerns with the nursing compact related to fees, data collection, and other concerns.

Establishing a military spouse liaison is an important investment in supporting military spouse employment. The liaison will support military spouses in a variety of ways. The

liaison would also help develop policy strategies to improve military spouse employment and provide helpful data to the Legislature. There is difficulty in accessing childcare on military bases because of the long waitlists. Childcare off-base is very expensive. The liaison would help military families access high-quality, affordable childcare. It is important to include veteran and retiree spouses. Employment challenges persist even after retirement.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) The nurse licensure compact appeals to military spouses. The section on the bill dealing with the nurse licensure compact is a step backward because its effect would be to delay adoption of the compact indefinitely. The concerns expressed in the bill are not the concerns of military spouses. Some states have operated in the compact for decades. The compact and other interstate compacts will help military spouses and families.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Melissa Johnson, Washington State Nurses Association; Sybill Hyppolite, Washington State Labor Council; Jamie Lynn Blum; Annikka Trabucco; Shane Inman, Veterans Legislative Coalition; and Mark Sullivan, Washington Department of Veterans Affairs.

(Other) Jonathan Seib, National Council of State Boards of Nursing.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.