

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5803

As Passed House:
February 28, 2024

Title: An act relating to the recruitment and retention of Washington National Guard members.

Brief Description: Concerning the recruitment and retention of Washington national guard members.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Conway, Boehnke, Dozier, Frame, Holy, Hunt, Kuderer, Liias, Lovelett, Lovick, MacEwen, Mullet, Nobles, Padden, Stanford, Wagoner, Warnick and Wellman; by request of Military Department).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Innovation, Community & Economic Development, & Veterans: 2/20/24, 2/21/24 [DP];

Appropriations: 2/23/24, 2/26/24 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/28/24, 96-0.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Provides a bonus for a National Guard member whose successful recruitment results in an enlistment contract.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON INNOVATION, COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, & VETERANS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Ryu, Chair; Donaghy, Vice Chair; Rule, Vice Chair; Volz, Ranking Minority Member; Caldier, Chambers, Christian, Cortes, Paul, Senn, Shavers, Street and Waters.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Staff: Martha Wehling (786-7067).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 29 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Bergquist, Vice Chair; Gregerson, Vice Chair; Macri, Vice Chair; Corry, Ranking Minority Member; Chambers, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Connors, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Couture, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Berg, Callan, Chopp, Davis, Fitzgibbon, Harris, Lekanoff, Pollet, Riccelli, Rude, Ryu, Sandlin, Schmick, Senn, Simmons, Slatter, Springer, Stokesbary, Stonier, Tharinger and Wilcox.

Staff: Jessica Van Horne (786-7288).

Background:

The State Militia.

The Washington Constitution provides for the organization of the state militia. The Governor serves as Commander-in-Chief, and with the advice and consent of the Senate, appoints the Adjutant General, who is chief of staff to the Governor and is the executive head of the militia.

The organized militia consists of the National Guard and the State Guard. The National Guard is the military force of Washington that is organized, equipped, and federally recognized under the National Defense Act. The Adjutant General commands the National Guard and recruits, trains, maintains, and administers the organized militia.

The Governor may order the organized militia into active service to execute Washington's laws or perform duties the Governor deems proper in certain circumstances or in imminent belief of those circumstances, including war, insurrection, rebellion, invasion, tumult, riot, mob, organized violence, or public disaster. The organized militia may also be ordered into active service to enforce controlled substances statutes; prepare for, or recover from, the specified circumstances; or when otherwise required for public health, safety, or welfare, including failure of responsible civil authorities to preserve law and order or protect life or property.

National Guard Enlistment.

National Guard enlistment must conform with the federal Department of Defense laws and regulations, which specify the term and the minimum and maximum age for original (new) recruits and reenlistment. A recruit to the National Guard must also be a United States citizen or permanent resident, meet certain educational requirements, achieve a minimum score on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test, and meet certain medical, physical, and moral requirements.

Summary of Bill:

A National Guard member may identify an appropriate recruitment prospect to the Military Department. If the prospect enters into an enlistment contract for entry or reentry into the National Guard, a "completed accession," the referring member may receive a referral bonus in an amount up to \$500. The Adjutant General will set the bonus amount each calendar year. Current members of the National Guard, command or senior enlisted advisors, and members with recruitment duties are ineligible for the referral program.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Innovation, Community & Economic Development, & Veterans):

(In support) The Select Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs was made aware of challenges with National Guard recruitment. The National Guard is critical to the security of our state and helps with disasters and other challenges. The Legislature recently passed a bill for recruitment for the Washington State Patrol, which is a good policy to get in place to start National Guard recruitment as well. The program is limited for a supplemental year; next year, the recruitment side of the bill should be pursued. The National Guard can use this to get on the road towards recruitment. Over 400 million veterans and their families unanimously support this bill.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) The National Guard includes 8,000 members in both the Army and Air. Those members support both federal and state missions and reply to orders from the President and the Governor. The Committee heard House Bill 1869 earlier; this bill is somewhat pared down by only including recruiting and referral incentives, but not the reenlistment bonus program. The bill is drafted after model legislation proposed at the National Conference of State Legislators and aligns with successful programs in other states like Florida, Kentucky, Minnesota, Vermont, and Virginia. There are 36 states pursuing this type of legislation and incentive program. Kentucky gets two recruits per week from the program, and it would be very helpful if Washington gets those same results. The referral bonus aligns with other recruiting efforts in the state, such as the Washington State Patrol, which uses bonuses to increase the number of troopers. A referral program helps the Military Department bring the best and brightest into the National Guard and will help close the gap on the 700 referrals needed for full strength.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Appropriations):

(In support) The Veterans Legislative Coalition supports the legislation.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying (Innovation, Community & Economic Development, & Veterans):

(In support) Senator Steve Conway, prime sponsor; and Charles Wharton, Veterans Legislative Coalition.

(Other) Bret Daugherty, Washington Military Department.

Persons Testifying (Appropriations): Charles Wharton, Veterans Legislative Coalition.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Innovation, Community & Economic Development, & Veterans): None.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Appropriations): None.