

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 1073

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**As Passed House:**  
February 17, 2026

**Title:** An act relating to keeping our Washington national guard strong act.

**Brief Description:** Keeping our Washington national guard strong act.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Leavitt, Abbarno, Ryu, Shavers, Paul, Timmons, Simmons, Rule, Barnard, Nance, Reeves and Donaghy.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Technology, Economic Development, & Veterans: 1/15/25, 1/21/25 [DP];  
Appropriations: 2/6/26, 2/9/26 [DP].

**Floor Activity:**

Passed House: 2/17/26, 96-1.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Creates a Washington National Guard retention program.
- Directs the Adjutant General to study retention needs, determine eligibility criteria, and determine the amount and schedule of retention bonuses.
- Requires the Military Department to report on retention needs and recommendations every three years.

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**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, & VETERANS**

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Ryu, Chair; Kloba, Vice Chair; Volz, Ranking Minority Member; Barnard, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Cortes, Donaghy, Keaton, Paul, Penner, Simmons and Waters.

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*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).

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## HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 28 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Gregerson, Vice Chair; Macri, Vice Chair; Couture, Ranking Minority Member; Connors, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Penner, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Schmick, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Berg, Bergquist, Burnett, Callan, Cortes, Doglio, Dye, Fitzgibbon, Keaton, Leavitt, Lekanoff, Manjarrez, Marshall, Peterson, Pollet, Ryu, Springer, Stonier, Street, Thai and Valdez.

**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 an 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 and includes approximately 8,400 citizen soldiers and airmen in the Army National Guard and the Air National Guard. 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. The National Guard is also subject to the call of the President of the United States to serve as part of the United States military.

#### National Guard Enlistment.

National Guard enlistment must conform with the federal Department of Defense laws and regulations, which specify the requirements for reenlistment.

### **Summary of Bill:**

The Adjutant General is required to create a National Guard Retention Program (Program). The Program is required to study National Guard retention needs to determine the amount of any reenlistment bonus that will encourage members to extend their terms of service. Retention needs may include factors such as length of service, critical skills needed, reenlistment term, and conversion of skills.

The Adjutant General is required to determine eligibility criteria for the Program and specify the criteria in policy. Any changes to the criteria are required to be published. The Adjutant General is also required to determine the amount of any reenlistment bonus and the schedule to make bonus payments.

The Military Department is required to report to the Governor and the Legislature at least once every three years, beginning November 1, 2027, on retention needs and recommendations.

**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 (Technology, Economic Development, & Veterans):**

(In support) Washington's National Guard is about 8,000 part-time citizen soldiers who strengthen the state's economy by showing up when called for national disasters, civic unrest, and Covid. The National Guard members staffed a food bank, fight wildfires, and are also called for foreign affairs. Most are part-time guardsmen who serve 45 to 60 days per year with outside careers with local employers. Some are full-time and provide critical skills to keep the National Guard ready for deployment in a federal or state capacity. In both groups, there are critical shortages in IT, cyber, aviation maintenance, vehicle maintenance, and logistics. It is hard to retain talented individuals, especially those who are not eligible for a federal retention bonus. For example, the first line leaders are generally ineligible for a federal bonus because of their years of service, but are key to retain for a trained force to be ready to respond. The state relies on the National Guard and should do all it can to retain the members.

(Opposed) None.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Appropriations):**

(In support) The National Guard are a critical resource during state and national emergencies, such as the flooding in December. They are often the first ones responding to

a natural disaster, and much of the response to disasters could not be done without them. Retaining and re-enlisting National Guard members is paramount. Veterans support this legislation.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying (Technology, Economic Development, & Veterans):** Representative Mari Leavitt, prime sponsor; James Baumgart, Washington Military Department; and Richard Thomas, Veterans Legislative Coalition.

**Persons Testifying (Appropriations):** Representative Mari Leavitt, prime sponsor; and Jerry Fugich, Veterans Legislative Coalition.

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

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