

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 5420

As Reported by House Committee On:
Technology, Economic Development, & Veterans
Appropriations

Title: An act relating to ensuring access to state benefits and opportunities for veterans, uniformed service members, and military spouses.

Brief Description: Ensuring access to state benefits and opportunities for veterans, uniformed service members, and military spouses.

Sponsors: Senators Lovick, Wagoner, Chapman, Dozier and Nobles.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Technology, Economic Development, & Veterans: 3/18/25, 3/21/25 [DPA], 2/18/26, 2/24/26 [DPA];

Appropriations: 4/4/25, 4/5/25 [DPA(TEDV)], 2/27/26, 3/2/26 [DPA(APP w/o TEDV)].

Brief Summary of Bill
(As Amended by Committee)

- Expands eligibility for certain pension, retirement, and veterans' benefits based on military service.
- Adds federal commissioned corps to the definition of uniformed services.
- Expands the types of military service that qualify military spouses and dependents for pension and retirement benefits, license moratoria, and veterans' employment.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, & VETERANS

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.

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Ryu, Chair; Kloba, Vice Chair; Cortes, Donaghy, Keaton, Paul, Penner, Shavers, Simmons, Thomas, Volz and Waters.

Staff: Emily Poole (786-7106).

Background:

Pension and Retirement Benefits.

Washington's state-sponsored retirement services provide credit for interruptive military service, and some plans provide military service credit for noninterruptive military service. The additional service credit cannot exceed five years. Eligibility requirements for credit vary across retirement services for firefighters, police, city employees, and public employees.

Other State Benefits.

Certain state benefits are available for certain types of military service, and in some cases, available to military spouses or dependents.

Department of Licensing Moratorium.

A license remains in effect for any person licensed by the Department of Licensing or certain boards and commissions who enters service in the armed forces, the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps (Public Health Corps), or the Merchant Marines. The license of a spouse or registered domestic partner of a member of the armed forces, including the Public Health Corps, must be placed in inactive status if requested by the licensee, if certain conditions are met.

Veterans' Scoring Criteria in Examinations.

Veteran applicants for public offices, positions, or employment with the state, political subdivisions, municipal corporations, and private companies or agencies contracting with the state receive a scoring criteria status of 5 to 10 percent.

Veterans' Employment.

Veterans receive certain benefits related to public and private employment, as follows:

- **Public employment:** Soldiers, sailors, guardians, marines, and other members of the uniformed services who are veterans of any war or of any military campaign with a ribbon and qualifying discharge, as well as their widows or widowers, receive preferential appointment and employment for every public department and all public works of the state and each county.
- **Employment restoration:** A person is entitled to be restored to an employment position after the person's period of active military duty or service as if on furlough or leave of absence.
- **Permissive employment:** A permissive private employment preference is available for honorably discharged soldiers, sailors, and marines who are veterans of any war

or any campaign for which a ribbon has been awarded, as well as their widows or widowers.

- Spouse employment: Spouses of veterans with a qualifying discharge and who have a service-connected permanent and total disability also receive preferential appointment and employment. In private employment, spouses of honorably discharged veterans who have a service-connected permanent and total disability may also be preferred for employment in every public department and all public works of the state and each county.

Definition.

The "uniformed services" for purposes of veterans employment are defined as: the armed forces, Army National Guard, and Air National Guard of any state, territory, commonwealth, possession, or district when engaged in active duty for training, inactive duty training, full-time National Guard duty, or state active duty; the Public Health Corps; the Coast Guard; and any other category designated by the President in time of war or national emergency.

Washington Service Members' Civil Relief Act.

The Washington Service Member's Civil Relief Act (WSMCRA) applies to military members and their dependents whose financial and legal obligations may be impacted by active military duty. The WSMCRA's main provisions provide rights with respect to default judgments and stays in civil proceedings. The WSMCRA also contains provisions restricting contract fines and penalties, restructuring interest rates on certain business loans, and tolling statutes of limitations during periods of military service.

For purposes of the WSMCRA, a "service member" is an active member of the United States armed forces, a member of a military reserve component, or a member of the National Guard.

Definitions.

For purposes of the militia and military affairs, a "member" is a soldier or airman of the organized militia. The organized militia includes both the state and national guard.

"Qualifying discharge" means discharge with an honorable, general under honorable, other than honorable, or any characterization of service, with certain limitations.

Federal Services.

The Public Health Corps is the uniformed service branch of the Public Health Service and one of eight uniformed services of the United States. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps (NOAA Corps) is another of the uniformed services. The Public Health Corps and the NOAA Corps are the two branches of uniformed services that have only commissioned officers and no enlisted or warrant officer ranks.

The United States armed forces include the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Space Force, and Coast Guard. Established in 2019 the Space Force is the newest branch of the armed forces, and its members are called guardians.

Summary of Amended Bill:

Pension and Retirement Benefits.

The uniformed services, defined to include the Public Health Corps and the NOAA Corps, are added to specified benefits for firefighters, police, and city employees.

Provisions regarding eligibility for Public Employees' Retirement System (PERS) Plan 1 military service credits are modified to include both members of the armed forces and the uniformed services, which is defined to include the Public Health Corps and the NOAA Corps.

Among other criteria, a veteran of the armed or uniformed services may be eligible for a service credit added to a police pension or PERS Plan 1 pension if the person received a medical discharge with an honorable record, instead of a discharge for physical reasons with an honorable record.

Other State Benefits.

Department of Licensing Moratorium.

The Department of Licensing moratorium is extended to a licensee who is a service member in, or a spouse or registered domestic partner of a service member in, the NOAA Corps.

Veterans' Scoring Criteria in Examinations.

Members of the uniformed services may receive a veteran scoring criteria status. "Member of the uniformed services" is defined to include a person who has served in the Public Health Corps or NOAA Corps who has received a qualifying discharge or is actively serving honorably.

Veterans' Employment.

The NOAA Corps is added to the definition of "uniformed services." Additional changes to the provisions of veterans' employment are made to the following categories:

- Public employment: The requirement that a person is a veteran of any war or campaign for which a ribbon was awarded is removed as a qualification for preferential appointment and employment. The preference for veteran spouses is extended to spouses of active duty service members. The preference is extended to airmen.
- Employment restoration: Members of the uniformed services are entitled to employment restoration.
- Permissive employment: Guardians, airmen, and uniformed service members are eligible for employment preferences. The requirement that a person must be a

veteran of any war or any campaign for which a ribbon has been awarded is removed as a required qualification.

- Spouse employment: Spouses of active duty service members are eligible for preferential public employment. Military spouses and spouses of active duty service members are eligible for a permissive preference in private employment.

Definitions.

For the militia and military affairs, the definition of "member" is expanded to include a guardian. For purposes of the WSMCRA, the definition of "service member" is expanded to include a member of the Public Health Corps or the NOAA Corps.

For purposes of a veteran's public employment preference and a veteran's or spouse's private employment preference, a "qualifying discharge" is defined as: (1) a discharge with an honorable characterization of service; (2) a discharge with a general under honorable conditions characterization of service; or (3) a discharge for any characterization of service if the reason for the discharge was related to a person's sexual orientation or gender.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The amended bill:

- specifies that among other criteria, a veteran of the armed or uniformed services may be eligible for a service credit added to a police pension or PERS Plan 1 pension if the person received a medical discharge with an honorable record, instead of a discharge for physical reasons with an honorable record;
- includes airmen in preferential public employment and permissive, preferential private employment;
- defines a qualifying discharge for a veteran's public employment preference and a veteran's or spouse's private employment preference as: (1) a discharge with an honorable characterization of service; (2) a discharge with a general under honorable conditions characterization of service; or (3) a discharge for any characterization of service if the reason for the discharge was sexual orientation or gender; and
- defines "veteran" for a veteran's public employment preference as a person who has served in certain specified capacities or a current, deployed member of the National Guard or Armed Forces Reserves.

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) This is critical legislation that will modernize Washington statutes to reflect the evolving needs of military members, veterans, uniformed service members, and their families. The bill recognizes the newest branch of the armed forces, the Space Force, and it expands access to benefits for the Public Health Corps and the NOAA Corps. The bill addresses the persistent challenge of military spouse unemployment by empowering private employers to prioritize military spouse hiring and allowing public employers to give preference to military spouses in their hiring practices.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator John Lovick, prime sponsor; and Tammie Perreault, Department of War/Defense.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended by Committee on Appropriations and without amendment by Committee on Technology, Economic Development, & Veterans. Signed by 29 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Gregerson, Vice Chair; Macri, Vice Chair; Couture, Ranking Minority Member; Connors, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Penner, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Berg, Bergquist, Burnett, Callan, Corry, Cortes, Doglio, Dye, Fitzgibbon, Keaton, Leavitt, Lekanoff, Manjarrez, Marshall, Peterson, Pollet, Rude, Ryu, Springer, Stonier, Street, Thai and Valdez.

Staff: David Pringle (786-7310).

Summary of Recommendation of Committee On Appropriations Compared to Recommendation of Committee On Technology, Economic Development, & Veterans:

The Appropriations Committee recommendation restores the requirement that to be eligible for the veterans public employment preference, a veteran must have a qualifying discharge as defined in state law. The new definition of "qualifying discharge" specific to public employment preference is removed.

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) This bill is a good policy with nominal fiscal impact. The licensure changes are particularly good, and adding the Space Corps and other organizations to the types qualifying is an important update. Expanding the eligibility for some of these benefits will improve the quality of life for the Washington families with member that will become benefits-eligible.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Allen Acosta, Veterans Legislative Coalition; and Tammie Perreault, Department of War and Defense.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.