

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## E2SHB 1102

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As Reported by Senate Committee On:  
State Government, Tribal Affairs & Elections, March 28, 2025  
Ways & Means, April 8, 2025

**Title:** An act relating to increasing support and services for veterans.

**Brief Description:** Increasing support and services for veterans.

**Sponsors:** House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Shavers, Ryu, Leavitt, Callan, Simmons, Goodman, Wylie, Nance, Fosse and Reeves).

**Brief History:** Passed House: 3/5/25, 96-1.

**Committee Activity:** State Government, Tribal Affairs & Elections: 3/21/25, 3/28/25 [DP-WM].

Ways & Means: 4/05/25, 4/08/25 [DP].

### Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) to provide information to recently discharged veterans about veterans benefits and services.
- Changes the definition of an eligible county under the Veterans Service Officer Program (Program) from a county with a population of 100,000 or less to a county where the percentage of the veteran population receiving federal disability or pension compensation is below the national average.
- Prioritizes counties with the lowest percentage of veterans receiving benefits for the Program.
- Requires WDVA to provide reports every two years including county-specific information about the number of resident veterans and services available.

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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.*

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## SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, TRIBAL AFFAIRS & ELECTIONS

**Majority Report:** Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Valdez, Chair; Krishnadasan, Vice Chair; Wilson, J., Ranking Member; Hasegawa, Kauffman, McCune, Riccelli and Short.

**Staff:** William Bridges (786-7312)

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## SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

**Majority Report:** Do pass.

Signed by Senators Robinson, Chair; Stanford, Vice Chair, Operating; Trudeau, Vice Chair, Capital; Frame, Vice Chair, Finance; Gildon, Ranking Member, Operating; Torres, Assistant Ranking Member, Operating; Schoesler, Ranking Member, Capital; Dozier, Assistant Ranking Member, Capital; Boehnke, Braun, Cleveland, Conway, Dhingra, Hansen, Hasegawa, Kauffman, Muzzall, Pedersen, Riccelli, Saldaña, Wagoner, Warnick, Wellman and Wilson, C..

**Staff:** Maria Hovde (786-7474)

**Background:** Veterans Service Officers. Veterans Service Officers (VSOs) assist veterans and their families in applying for a wide range of veterans' benefits, such as health care, service-connected disability compensation, employment benefits, and survivors' benefits provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

In 2019, the Legislature created the Veterans Service Officer Program (Program), within the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA), to provide funding for underserved counties to establish and maintain a VSO. Underserved counties are those with populations of 100,000 or less, which was 25 counties as of 2023. Because the Program is subject to appropriation, it is funding one VSO in each of the following six counties: Asotin, Clallam, Island, Skamania, Stevens, and Walla Walla.

There are 17 other counties that have county VSOs primarily funded by local property taxes. These counties maintain agreements with WDVA, allowing WDVA to provide in-kind support services, such as accreditation and training. Eight federally recognized Indian tribes have similar agreements with WDVA: the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, the Makah Tribe, the Nooksack Indian Tribe, the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe, the Suquamish Tribe, the Snoqualmie Indian Tribe, the Tulalip Tribes, and the Yakama Nation.

Average Number of Veterans Receiving Compensation. The national average for veterans receiving federal disability or pension compensation is 32 percent. The state average is 31 percent, with 25 counties below the national average.

**Summary of Bill:** Requiring the Provision of Information to Veterans. WDVA must contact discharged veterans within 90 days after receiving a discharge notice from the Department of Defense and provide information about benefits and services available to veterans.

Expanding the Veterans Service Officer Program. The definition of an eligible county to participate in the Program is changed from a county with a population of 100,000 or less to a county where the percentage of the veteran population receiving federal disability or pension compensation is below the national average. WDVA is required to prioritize VSOs for counties where the percentage of the veteran population receiving federal disability or pension compensation is lowest, and then to eligible counties without a VSO. The Legislature intends to expand the Program by one or two VSOs per biennium.

WDVA may adopt rules and must require that any county participating in the Program allow veterans residing in an adjacent county access to a VSO funded by the Program.

Requiring Reports. Beginning in December 2026, and every two years thereafter, WDVA is required to report on services available to veterans to the Governor and the Legislature and provide, among other things, information on the number of veterans residing in each county, the available services in each county, and each county where the veteran population receiving services is below the national average.

Legislative Findings. Various legislative findings are made, including the number of underserved veterans and the critical role VSOs have in assisting veterans.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony (State Government, Tribal Affairs & Elections):**  
PRO: The Veterans Legislative Coalition, representing over two dozen recognized Veteran Service Organizations across the state support this bill. Transitioning from military to civilian life can be challenging, and having a strong support network can make a significant difference in a veteran's well-being. Veterans using their earned VA health care will have positive outcomes in their health. But they can also save thousands of dollars through home loans, GI Bill benefits, memorial services, and more. Now we must do our part.

According to the research from the National Library of Medicine, those that use the VA health care are veterans with financial barriers, have served longer, are female, and are people of color. It is important we continue to honor our commitment to our veterans, which

is a contractual pact through their service. It's important we continue to honor our commitment to our veterans, a contractual pact through their service.

This bill will also have a direct effect on family members of veterans. A caregiver of a disabled veteran, spouse, adult, child, or in some cases a significant other, upon the death of the veteran may be eligible for Dependent Indemnity Compensation, which is currently around \$2,000 a month. Many of those eligible don't know this. This money will help the recipients, stimulate the economy, as well as increasing the sales tax revenue.

**OTHER:** VSOs connect veterans to a wide range of federal benefits including health care benefits, service-connected disability compensation, nonservice-connected pension, employment benefits, education benefits, housing benefits, burial benefits, and survivors' benefits. Providing VSO assistance is a foundational service offered by state veteran agencies nationwide and WDVA partners with counties, federally recognized Indian tribes, and nonprofit veteran service organizations.

The current VSO Program funds six counties to support county VSOs. there are 25 counties where the percent of veterans receiving VA disability benefits is below the national average of 32 percent, and these counties would be prioritized for veteran service officer assistance in this bill. There are approximately 162,000 veterans in Washington receiving VA disability benefits each month and the average monthly disability payment is over \$1,800 per month. Federal VA disability payments, paid directly to WA veterans, total more than \$3.6 billion dollars a year.

**Persons Testifying (State Government, Tribal Affairs & Elections):** PRO: Representative Clyde Shavers, Prime Sponsor; Charles Wharton, AMVETS Legislative Director; Allen Acosta, Veterans Legislative Coalition; Susan Woods, Veteran's Legislative Coalition.

**OTHER:** David Puente, WA State Department of Veterans Affairs.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (State Government, Tribal Affairs & Elections):** No one.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means):** None.

**Persons Testifying (Ways & Means):** No one.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means):** No one.