

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESHB 1541

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

Title: An act relating to the veterans affairs advisory committee.

Brief Description: Concerning the veterans affairs advisory committee.

Sponsors: House Committee on Technology, Economic Development, & Veterans (originally sponsored by Representatives Abell, Donaghy, Morgan, Kloba, Shavers, Zahn, Hill and Simmons; by request of Department of Veterans Affairs).

Brief History: Passed House: 3/11/25, 96-0.

Committee Activity: State Government, Tribal Affairs & Elections: 3/25/25, 3/28/25
[DPA, w/oRec].

Brief Summary of Amended Bill

- Modifies the membership of the Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, TRIBAL AFFAIRS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Valdez, Chair; Krishnadasan, Vice Chair; Hasegawa, Kauffman, Riccelli and Short.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senators Wilson, J., Ranking Member; McCune.

Staff: William Bridges (786-7312)

Background: The Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee. The Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee (VAAC) provides advice and makes recommendations to the Governor and the

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.

director of the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA). The VAAC has 17 members appointed by the Governor to serve four-year terms. The VAAC consists of the following:

- one member from the Washington Soldiers Home in Orting;
- one member from the Washington Veterans Home in Retsil;
- one member from each of the three congressionally chartered and recognized veterans service organizations with the largest memberships in the state;
- ten members to represent the congressionally chartered and recognized veterans service organizations that have at least one active chapter in the state; and
- two members who are veterans at large.

The Governor must ensure that appointments represent all regions of the state and must include minority and women veterans' viewpoints. No organization can have more than one official representative on the committee at any one time. When choosing the representatives for the Orting and Retsil homes, the Governor must consider recommendations from the resident council of each home. If no nominations are provided, the Governor may appoint a member at large in place of a home's representative.

State Veterans Homes. The State Constitution requires the Legislature provide a soldiers' home for honorably discharged resident soldiers disabled in the line of duty. The state currently has four veterans homes served by the WDVA: Orting, Retsil, Spokane, and Walla Walla.

Summary of Amended Bill: Modifying the Membership of the Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee. The Governor is required to appoint two representatives from the veterans homes, based on nominations from the homes, and one representative who is a veteran with lived experience as justice-involved or formerly incarcerated.

The number of member nominations made by the WDVA director to the Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee is reduced from ten to nine. Of the nine members, the WDVA director will nominate members for the Governor from the following categories:

- representatives from congressionally chartered or nationally recognized veterans services organizations listed in the directory for the state of Washington;
- a veteran who is an enrolled member of federally recognized tribe;
- a current or former member of the Washington National Guard; and
- veterans with lived experience, such as faced barriers to housing, post-traumatic stress recovery, and substance use disorder.

Technical changes are made.

EFFECT OF STATE GOVERNMENT, TRIBAL AFFAIRS & ELECTIONS COMMITTEE AMENDMENT(S):

- Requires the Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee to have one representative who is

a veteran with lived experience as justice-involved or formerly incarcerated. The number of member nominations made by the WDVA director to the Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee is reduced from ten to nine.

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 on Engrossed Substitute House Bill: *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* PRO: The bill's modest changes will update the composition of the Veterans Advisory Committee that recognizes the current demographics of veterans in the state. The experience of tribal veterans, National Guard members, and veterans with lived experiences have important lessons to share.

CON: Formerly justice-involved veterans should be expressly considered as members of the Veterans Advisory Committee. Thirty-three percent of veterans have been justice involved and they face unique barriers that need to be recognized.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Hunter Abell, Prime Sponsor; Heidi Audette, WA State Department of Veterans Affairs .

CON: Tuan Quach, Equity in Education Center; Candice Baughman; Michael Shoemaker; Louis Ihrig; Rory Andes; Kurtis Robinson, I Did The Time/ Revive Center For Returning Citizens; Thomas Digiorgio.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.