

SENATE BILL REPORT

2ESHB 1541

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
State Government, Tribal Affairs & Elections, February 16, 2026

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: 1/22/26, 91-0.

Committee Activity: State Government, Tribal Affairs & Elections: 3/25/25, 3/28/25 [DPA, w/oRec]; 2/03/26, 2/16/26 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Modifies the membership of the Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee by reducing the number of members representing veterans service organizations, increasing the number of at-large members, and adding military experience and personal attributes to member selection criteria.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, TRIBAL AFFAIRS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Valdez, Chair; Kauffman, Vice Chair; Wilson, J., Ranking Member; McCune.

Staff: Greg Vogel (786-7413)

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

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.

of the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA). The committee consists of 17 members appointed by the Governor to serve four-year terms. Membership must include:

- one member from the Washington Soldiers' Home and Colony in Orting;
- one member from the Washington Veterans' Home at Retsil;
- three members, one from each of the three congressionally chartered and recognized veterans service organizations with the largest membership in the state;
- ten members representing 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 geographical parts of the state, as well as minority and women veterans' viewpoints. The committee must appoint members to serve as liaisons to the state veterans' homes, unless the home has a representative appointed to the committee. Members appointed before 1992 are eligible to serve until the expiration of their terms and are eligible for reappointment.

State Veterans' Homes. The State Constitution mandates that the Legislature provide a soldiers' home for honorably discharged resident soldiers, sailors, and marines who were disabled in the line of duty. These state veterans' homes are managed by WDVA. In 1890 the Legislature created the Washington Soldiers' Home in Orting. In 1907 the Legislature established a branch of the Washington Soldiers' Home at Retsil, called the Washington Veterans' Home. In 2001 the Legislature established another branch in Spokane, called the Eastern Washington Veterans' Home. In 2014 the Walla Walla Veterans' Home was established.

Summary of Bill: The Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee membership is modified as follows:

- the Governor must appoint two representatives from the veterans' homes, based on nominations from the homes;
- the Governor is required to appoint six, rather than ten, members from nationally recognized veterans service organizations with an active chapter in the state;
- the Governor is required to appoint six, rather than two, at-large members; and
- member appointments must reflect military experience and personal attributes, in addition to geographic diversity, and minority and women veterans' viewpoints.

Reference to the 1992 member appointments is removed.

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 (Regular Session 2025): *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 (State Government, Tribal Affairs & Elections): 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 (State Government, Tribal Affairs & Elections): No one.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (State Government, Tribal Affairs & Elections) (Regular Session 2026): PRO: The bill reorganizes the committee to account for some long-time vacancies under the current statute. Looking at reorganizing the committee, there are several important principles that emerged. One is that the primary inputs for the committee come from the veteran's service organizations. The second is adhering to the principle that every veteran a veteran and when looking at the at-large positions, allowing them to be filled based on military experiences and personal attributes. At the end of the day, the bill will result in the Governor receiving an increasingly broad amount of advice on veterans' issues, which will be to the benefit of the entire state.

Persons Testifying (State Government, Tribal Affairs & Elections): PRO: Representative Hunter Abell, Prime Sponsor; David Puente, Director, Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs; Tarra Simmons, House Representative.

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