
ENGROSSED SECOND SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 1102

State of Washington

69th Legislature

2025 Regular Session

By House Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Shavers, Ryu, Leavitt, Callan, Simmons, Goodman, Wylie, Nance, Fosse, and Reeves)

READ FIRST TIME 02/13/25.

1 AN ACT Relating to increasing support and services for veterans;
2 amending RCW 43.60A.230; adding a new section to chapter 43.60A RCW;
3 and creating a new section.

4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds that veterans are
6 eligible for state and federal benefits, but may be unaware of those
7 benefits or the process to apply for them. Veterans service officers
8 serve a critical role in assisting veterans and their families with
9 identifying and applying for federal benefits, including health care,
10 service-connected disability, nonservice-connected pension,
11 employment, education, housing, burial, and survival benefits. The
12 federal department of veterans affairs provides over \$6.5 billion per
13 year in benefits to veterans in Washington. The average veteran
14 receiving service-connected disability compensation benefits receives
15 over \$1,700 per month.

16 The legislature further finds that nationwide, approximately 32
17 percent of veterans receive federal disability compensation.
18 Washington currently has approximately 530,000 resident veterans, but
19 only 158,000 veterans are receiving federal benefits. Currently,
20 veterans in 15 Washington counties receive benefits at or above the
21 national average, 21 counties are within 10 percent of the national

1 average, and three counties are more than 10 percent below the
2 national average.

3 Therefore, the legislature intends to expand the veterans service
4 officer program started in 2019 to increase the number of veterans
5 applying for and receiving federal benefits. The program's first
6 veterans service officer assisting veterans in the identification of
7 benefits and filing of claims increased the number of veterans
8 applying for benefits from 13 in the first year to 323 in the third
9 year, and from no annual disability payments to \$2,696,524 in federal
10 benefits each year. The Washington state department of veterans
11 affairs' September 30, 2024, veterans service officer program report
12 estimates the cost to expand the program is \$160,000 per year for
13 each additional county. The legislature intends to expand the program
14 by one to two veterans service officers per biennium beginning with
15 the counties with the lowest percentage of benefits received, until
16 all counties are at or above the national average.

17 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 43.60A
18 RCW to read as follows:

19 The department must support veterans by providing information
20 regarding available veterans services. Subject to the availability of
21 amounts appropriated for the specific purposes provided in this
22 section, the department must:

23 (1) Contact veterans within 90 days of receipt of a discharge
24 notice from the department of defense and provide information about
25 veterans benefits and services; and

26 (2) Beginning December 1, 2026, and every two years thereafter,
27 report to the governor and the appropriate standing committees of the
28 legislature regarding veterans services. The report must include, at
29 a minimum:

30 (a) The number of veterans residing in each county;

31 (b) The number and type of veterans services available in each
32 county;

33 (c) The number of veterans served in the reporting period by the
34 department, veterans service officer program, and counties
35 contracting with the department for veterans services, including the
36 number of veterans served who reside in an adjacent county;

37 (d) The number of claims filed in the reporting period by
38 veterans service organizations contracting with the department;

1 (e) The percentage of veterans served in the reporting period who
2 received service-related disability and nonservice-connected
3 veterans' pensions; and

4 (f) Identification of:

5 (i) Each county where the percentage of the veteran population
6 receiving service-related disability and nonservice-connected
7 veterans' pensions is below the national average; and

8 (ii) Each county that does not provide access to a veterans
9 service officer through the veterans' assistance program defined in
10 RCW 73.08.005, through a contract with the department, through the
11 veterans service officer program described in RCW 43.60A.230, or
12 directly through the department.

13 **Sec. 3.** RCW 43.60A.230 and 2019 c 223 s 1 are each amended to
14 read as follows:

15 (1) There is created in the department the veterans service
16 officer program. The purpose of the veterans service officer program
17 is to provide funding to underserved eligible counties to establish
18 and maintain a veterans service officer within the county. "Eligible
19 counties," for the purposes of this section, means counties (~~with a~~
20 ~~population of one hundred thousand or less~~) where the percentage of
21 the veteran population receiving federal disability or pension
22 compensation is below the national average.

23 (2) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated (~~in the~~
24 ~~veterans service officer fund under RCW 43.60A.235~~) for the specific
25 purposes provided in this section, the department must:

26 (a) Establish a process to educate local governments, veterans,
27 and those still serving in the national guard or armed forces reserve
28 of the veterans service officer program;

29 (b) Develop partnerships with local governments to assist in
30 establishing and maintaining local veterans service officers in
31 eligible counties who elect to have a veterans service officer; and

32 (c) Provide funding to support eligible counties in establishing
33 and maintaining local accredited veterans service officers. (~~Funding~~
34 ~~is provided on a first-come, first-served basis. Funding may only be~~
35 ~~provided to support the equivalent of one full-time veterans service~~
36 ~~officer per eligible county.~~) The department shall prioritize
37 additional funding to eligible counties with the lowest percentage of
38 the veteran population receiving federal disability or pension

1 compensation, and then to eligible counties without a veterans
2 service officer.

3 (3) The application process for the veterans service officer
4 program must be prescribed as to manner and form by the department.

5 (4) The department may adopt rules necessary to implement this
6 section. The department shall include a requirement that any county
7 that participates in the veterans service officer program must allow
8 any veteran residing in an adjacent county access to the county's
9 veterans service officer.

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