

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 5477

*As Reported By House Committee on:
State Government*

Title: An act relating to veterans.

Brief Description: Authorizing veterans' benefits for Women's Air Forces Service Pilots and merchant marines.

Sponsor(s): Senators Conner, Rasmussen, Bauer and Nelson.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
State Government, April 2, 1991, DPA.

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
STATE GOVERNMENT**

Majority Report: *Do pass as amended.* Signed by 10 members: Representatives Anderson, Chair; Pruitt, Vice Chair; McLean, Ranking Minority Member; Bowman, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chandler; R. Fisher; Grant; Moyer; O'Brien; and Sheldon.

Staff: Linda May (786-7135).

Background: In 1988, the United States granted federal veteran status to certain members of the merchant marine who served in World War II. In 1977, the federal government had granted similar status to members of the Women's Air Forces Service Pilots (WASPS). Currently, members of these two groups are not officially recognized as veterans by the state of Washington.

A number of benefits are available to individuals who are recognized by the state as veterans. For example, veterans meeting certain conditions may receive up to five years' service credit in the calculation of their retirement benefits. Veterans and their families in need or the families of deceased veterans in need can receive aid from the Veterans' Assistance Fund, a relief program administered at the county level. In addition, disabled veterans or veterans who were prisoners of war may receive special vehicle licenses at no charge, free state hunting and fishing licenses, and free admission to and free use of campsites in state parks.

Summary of Amended Bill: Members of the merchant marine who served in World War II and members of the WASPS are added to the state's definition of "veteran." In order to qualify for state veteran benefits, a member of one of these groups must have an honorable discharge or a discharge for physical reasons with an honorable record. Members of the merchant marine must have been employed during the period of armed conflict December 7, 1941, to August 15, 1945, and must have been employed by the War Shipping Administration, the Office of Defense Transportation, the U.S. Army Transport Service, or the Naval Transportation Service.

The statute concerning membership in the Soldiers' Home or Colony or the Veterans' Home is modified to include a definition of "veteran." The definition is the same as the amended definition above.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill: The amended bill includes a more specific definition of which members of the merchant marine meet the state definition of "veteran." The amended bill adds a different definition than the original bill to the statute regarding membership in the Soldiers' or Veterans' Homes. The amended bill also adds one additional section making a technical correction to a statute regarding civilians who work with the military.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: The companion measure to this bill was passed earlier by this committee; it is hoped that the committee will pass it again. Merchant marines are pleased that the WASPS are included in this version. Six states have authorized similar status for these groups. The bill will not provide these people with many benefits, but it does honor them. It was surprising that the other bill ran into a stumbling block in the Appropriations Committee; the bill should cost very little. The federal government has taken the step to recognize these people as veterans. It is high time that the State did the same. Most of these people are 70 to 80 years old and can't wait much longer. All this bill does is grant recognition.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Senator Conner; Harold Schmidt and James Colamarino, American Merchant Marine Veterans Association; and Keith Sherman, Veterans Legislative Coalition (all in favor).