

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESHB 2095

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to counseling veterans and their dependents.

Brief Description: Establishing a counseling network for veterans and their families.

Sponsor(s): By House Committee on State Government (originally sponsored by Representatives R. Johnson, McLean, Anderson, Jones, Kremen, Braddock, Valle, Wineberry, Franklin, Day, Pruitt, Rayburn, Roland, Spanel and Prentice; by request of Department of Veterans Affairs).

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
State Government, March 6, 1991, DPS;
Appropriations, March 10, 1991, DPS(SG)-A;
Passed House, March 20, 1991, 98-0;
Passed Legislature, 98-0.

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
STATE GOVERNMENT**

Majority Report: *That Substitute House Bill No. 2095 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.* 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).

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
APPROPRIATIONS**

Majority Report: *The substitute bill by Committee on State Government be substituted therefor and the substitute bill as amended by Committee on Appropriations do pass.* Signed by 27 members: Representatives Locke, Chair; Inslee, Vice Chair; Spanel, Vice Chair; Silver, Ranking Minority Member; Morton, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Appelwick; Belcher; Bowman; Braddock; Brekke; Dorn; Ebersole; Fuhrman; Hine; Lisk; May; McLean; Mielke; Nealey; Peery; Pruitt; Rust; H. Sommers; Sprengle; Valle; Vance; and Wang.

Staff: John Woolley (786-7154).

Background: Individuals exposed to armed conflict in a war situation sometimes suffer long-term psychological and social disorders. Family members of these individuals may suffer stress and trauma as well. Members of the armed services may seek professional counseling and care through the military. Members of the military reserves and the National Guard lose access to many federal counseling programs as soon as they leave active duty.

For several years, the state Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has been coordinating a program for treatment of Viet Nam veterans suffering from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). VA reports an increase in incidence of PTSD in Viet Nam veterans concurrent with the conflict in the Persian Gulf.

Summary of Bill: The Department of Veterans Affairs will contract with professional counselors to provide an option of direct mental health treatment for war-affected veterans, for soldiers returning from the Persian Gulf, and for their families. VA will expand its existing counseling program for Viet Nam veterans. VA will also work to train mental health professionals about the effects of war-related stress and trauma, and will provide other mental health support services to veterans and their families. VA will coordinate its programs with federal programs and other mental health programs to minimize duplication of services.

Fiscal Note: Available on substitute.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: (State Government): VA has managed a successful PTSD counseling program. Few people in the mental health profession have as much expertise about PTSD symptoms and treatment. Treatment is more effective if initiated while the war experience is relatively recent. Re-entry into the family can also be very stressful. This is a timely bill that can help returning veterans now.

(Appropriations): The Department of Veterans Affairs supports the bill as it allows the expansion of services to families and will permit the department to work with mental health professionals in the community.

Testimony Against: (State Government): None.

(Appropriations): None.

Witnesses: (State Government): Representative Rob Johnson, Representative Judi Roland; and Jesse Farias and Tom Schumacher, Department of Veterans Affairs.

(Appropriations): Jesse Farias, Department of Veterans Affairs.