

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1437

As Reported By House Committee On:
State Government

Title: An act relating to audits of services for veterans.

Brief Description: Requiring policy and performance audits of department of veteran affairs, Washington soldiers' home, and Washington veterans' home.

Sponsors: Representatives R. Meyers, Dorn, Pruitt and Campbell.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
State Government, March 3, 1993, DP.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Anderson, Chair; Veloria, Vice Chair; Reams, Ranking Minority Member; Vance, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Campbell; Conway; Dyer; King; and Pruitt.

Staff: Bonnie Austin (786-7135).

Background: The Department of Veteran's Affairs (DVA) is responsible for providing advice, assistance, and counseling services to the state's 650,000 veterans. DVA is also responsible for running the two state institutions charged with the residential care of the state's indigent veterans. Admittance to the Washington Soldiers' Home at Orting, and Washington Veterans' Home at Retsil is limited to honorably discharged veterans of U.S. wars, members of the state militia disabled in the line of duty, and certain surviving spouses.

DVA is audited annually by the state auditor and the federal Veteran's Affairs Department. The state audit is a fiscal audit. The federal audit is both a performance audit and a fiscal audit. According to DVA, administrative expenses are currently 13.3 percent of their budget.

The state auditor is currently prohibited from conducting performance audits. The Legislative Budget Committee is responsible for performing performance audits of state programs.

Summary of Bill: The state auditor will conduct policy and performance audits of DVA, the Washington Soldiers' Home and the Washington Veterans' Home. The auditor will conduct continuing audits of the methods, procedures, and organization used to control costs, schedules, productivity, contract amendments, and project design. The auditor will provide an annual report to the director of DVA.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: The welfare of those veterans in these homes is the paramount duty of the state. There is an issue over the amount of money spent on administrative costs. The veterans do not know where money in the revolving fund is going and their morale is low. The quality of the food isn't good and choice items are in short supply. Mail is being opened. The residents and employees at Retsil are unhappy. We need better reporting of the use of funds. Funds credited to Retsil are being spent in Olympia. The veterans do not want to go to Medicaid.

Testimony Against: Audits are welcomed, but we are already audited on an annual basis by both the state auditor, and by the federal Veterans Affairs Department which conducts both a performance audit and a financial audit. This is enough. According to recent audits, this department is one of the most efficient in state government. This department should not be singled out for state auditor performance audits.

Witnesses: Representative Ron Myers, prime sponsor (pro); Robert Sauter, veteran (pro); Marvin Barnes (pro); Beau Bergeron, Director Washington State Department of Veteran's Affairs (con); and Bill Merifield (con).