

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 2670

As Passed House:

February 13, 2004

Title: An act relating to veterans' relief.

Brief Description: Studying matters affecting the administration of the veterans' assistance fund.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Local Government (originally sponsored by Representatives Moeller, Sullivan, Morrell, Hinkle, Chase, McCoy, Cox, Clibborn, Condotta, Lovick, G. Simpson, Linville and Rockefeller).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Local Government: 2/5/04 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/13/04, 96-0.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Develops Veterans' Assistance Program and Veterans' Advisory Board to be implemented by the counties for the purpose of providing local indigent veterans assistance.
- Shifts tax levy power currently funding local veterans' organizations to county-created Veterans' Assistance Program and Veterans' Assistance Board.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Romero, Chair; D. Simpson, Vice Chair; Schindler, Ranking Minority Member; Jarrett, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Ahern, Clibborn, Edwards, Ericksen, Mielke, Moeller and Upthegrove.

Staff: Matt Kuehn (786-7291).

Background:

The 73.08 RCW addresses issues of indigent military veterans' relief. Homeless veterans

are currently provided assistance through a variety of Federal Veterans Affairs and state programs. For indigent veterans, relief is currently distributed through local veterans' organizations. The veterans' organizations disbursements are funded by county tax levies, and the proceeds of those levies are drawn upon by the veterans organization's commander or designee.

The county retains some duties. Burial services to honorably discharged veterans and their families are subsidized by the county. The county may order the head of the organizations distributing relief to post a performance bond. The organization must file annual statements of the amount of relief funds distributed and to whom those funds were given. Finally, the county may not send indigent veterans or their families to almshouses or orphanages without the consent of the organizations providing services.

The RCW 73.04.080 mandates that the county pay rents for the meeting place of veterans organizations if the rent is reasonable and the state or municipality is not already furnishing a meeting place.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Joint Committee for Veterans' and Military Affairs is instructed to conduct an interim study of indigent veterans relief. The study is to focus on current services provided by the county and the necessity of amending 73.08 RCW, the current veterans relief act.

The interim committee must report its findings to the Legislature prior to the 2005 session. The committee must also provide suggested legislation to the Legislature. The interim study expires in July of 2005.

The counties are given authority to continue current veterans' relief practices without disruption. The counties may provide aid beyond financial assistance and may assign nonprofit organizations to provide indigent veterans' services. The counties may provide services relating to advertising the availability of aid from the veterans' fund.

The counties are also authorized to reimburse themselves for reasonable administrative costs out of collected money from the tax levies supporting the veterans' fund.

The counties are also encouraged to raise the amount of aid provided to account for inflationary increases where appropriate.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause that takes place immediately.

Testimony For: The bill was crafted by a coalition of veterans' organizations and the counties. The controversial issues with the bill are minor. A substitute bill, performing an interim study, would be acceptable. Something has to be done now, even if that is simply a study bill. Any step forward in modernizing veterans relief is good. The current law was enacted in the 1880s and it is outdated. Some counties are not acting strictly in compliance with the current law. The counties have no desire to act illegally, but the laws badly need to be updated.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Moeller, prime sponsor; Craig Pridemore, Clark County Commissioners; Doris Gross, The American Legion; Tim Podhora, Clark County; Krint Fritch, Clark County; Sharon Wylie; John King, Washington Department of Veterans Affairs; and Vern Spatz, Grays Harbor County, County Anacortes.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.