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## Local Government Committee

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### HB 2670

**Brief Description:** Concerning veterans and veterans' relief.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Moeller, Sullivan, Morrell, Hinkle, Chase, McCoy, Cox, Clibborn, Condotta, Lovick, Simpson, G., Linville and Rockefeller.

Brief Summary of Bill
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develops Veterans' Assistance Program and Veterans' Advisory Board to be implemented by the counties for the purpose of providing local indigent veterans assistance.</li><li>• Shifts tax levy power currently funding local veterans' organizations to county-created Veterans' Assistance Program and Veterans' Assistance Board.</li></ul> |
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**Hearing Date:** 2/5/04

**Staff:** Matt Kuehn (786-7291).

**Background:**

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.

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 Bill:**

This bill expands the counties' role in services for indigent veterans. The local organizational role in the providing of services is shifted from veterans' service organizations to a Veterans' Assistance Program (VAP). The local government may select local veterans' organizations to act as the VAP, but the county may instead designate that authority to a local nonprofit organization. Additionally, the county legislative authority may itself retain the operational power of the VAP.

A veteran is considered indigent in the following circumstances: a) If the veteran is receiving one of several types of specified public assistance; b) if the veteran is unable to pay basic living costs (average reasonable payments for shelter, food, utilities and transportation); c) or if the veteran receives an annual, after-tax income that is 150% or less of the current Federally established poverty level. The bill is not clear whether the federal poverty level used as a standard is the Federal Health and Human Services Department's version, or the Federal Census Bureau's version.

The VAP provides for burial subsidies if the veteran is indigent. The county continues to pay rent subsidies in certain circumstances. The county may also require that the VAP post a bond where the county sees fit.

The policies and procedures governing the VAP are developed by the VAP management staff in collaboration with the county legislative authority and an independent Veterans Advisory Board (VAB). Beyond its role in giving input into the policy and procedure process, the VAB is broadly charged with representing indigent and suffering veterans and family members within each county.

Each county legislative authority must create a VAB. The composition of the VAB must be broadly representative of the veterans' community and may be made up of no less than 51% veterans. The VAB members must fulfil the same residency requirements as recipients.

The various veterans' service organizations, veterans' coalitions and nonprofit organizations are generally encouraged to submit names of representatives for the VAB, but the county legislative authority is not required to make any affirmative step to recruit members of the board.

The VAP is funded by tax levy. Eligibility for services is limited to indigent veterans who received honorable discharges or general discharges under honorable conditions. To qualify the veterans must also be residents of the counties from which they are to receive assistance and be residents of the state for at least a year.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.