

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 3084

As Reported by House Committee On:

Children & Family Services

Appropriations

Title: An act relating to assistance for military families.

Brief Description: Helping families suffering financial hardship due to national guard activation.

Sponsors: Representatives Darneille, Simpson, G., Chase, Upthegrove, Ormsby, Romero, Morrell, Kenney and O'Brien.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Children & Family Services: 2/4/04, 2/5/04 [DPS];

Appropriations: 2/9/04 [DPS(CFS)].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Establishes a Military Family Assistance Program in the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Darneille, Vice Chair; Boldt, Ranking Minority Member; Roach, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bailey, Dickerson, Miloscia, Pettigrew and Shabro.

Staff: Cynthia Forland (786-7152).

Background:

Families of individuals who serve in the United States military reserves face many challenges when those individuals are away performing military service, whether serving in support of a military operation overseas, performing security or other duty in a local or regional location, or performing training locally. Due to the geographic dispersion of military reserve families, it is often more difficult to obtain information about available benefits and can be more difficult to access those benefits. It may also be more difficult for military reserve families to access support services that are normally available at active duty installations.

There has been a significant increase in the number of military reserves that have been mobilized in recent months. As of February 2004, 3,961 members of the Washington National Guard have been mobilized.

The Minuteman Emergency Assistance Fund (MEAF) was created in March 1995 to provide emergency assistance to members of the Washington National Guard facing personal financial hardships. Assistance can be provided either through a grant or an interest-free loan, with most assistance being provided through grants. The MEAF is administered by the National Guard Association of Washington. Sources of monies for the MEAF consist of the Combined Federal Campaign, which provides 95 percent of monies, and private donations. Annual contributions to the MEAF generally total \$20,000. The MEAF usually receives 60 to 75 requests for assistance each year, although the number of applications has increased in recent months due to the increased mobilization of members of the Washington National Guard.

In order to be eligible for assistance from the MEAF, an individual must be a member of the Washington National Guard in good standing with at least one year to the member's expiration term of service, and have not previously applied for assistance from the MEAF. Applications to the MEAF are usually reviewed and funds disbursed within 24 hours to 48 hours. Applicants for assistance must provide financial information and authorize the MEAF to contact employer and creditors to verify information. Applications are reviewed to verify that the application is based on a true emergency situation. Whenever possible, awarded funds are issued directly to the appropriate creditor.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

There is established in the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED) a Military Family Assistance Program. To the extent of available funds, the CTED is required to contract with an existing military family assistance program in the state that provides emergency grants to families with financial hardship due to National Guard activation.

The Director of the CTED is required to include provisions in its contracts indicating that any military family assistance program that receives funds from the CTED must not engage in discrimination that denies assistance to a family on the basis of age, gender, race, sexual orientation, national origin, creed, religion, or presence of a disability.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The findings no longer include a reference to families of military reserves, thereby clarifying that the established Military Family Assistance Program is limited to families with financial hardship due to National Guard activation.

The Director of the CTED is required to include provisions in its contracts indicating that any military family assistance program that receives funds from the CTED must not engage in

discrimination that denies assistance to a family on the basis of age, gender, race, sexual orientation, national origin, creed, religion, or presence of a disability.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on February 6, 2004.

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

Testimony For: (Original bill) The Minuteman Emergency Assistance Fund provides assistance to families of members of the Washington National Guard. The Fund provides grants and loans to families for needs arising from circumstances beyond their control, such as non-receipt of military pay. The need for assistance has been exacerbated by the recent federal mobilizations. There are also support programs and medical benefits for individuals activated for federal duty. We are faced with massive deployments. The Fund is currently tapped out. An infusion of state support would be greatly appreciated. It can be difficult for families to find doctors who will accept Tricare. Families are having to pay for services that the member of the National Guard, who has been mobilized, would have done on their own.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Darneille, prime sponsor; Timothy Lowenberg, Washington Military Department; and Annie DeAndrea, Washington National Guard Family Support Group.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill by Committee on Children & Family Services be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 27 members: Representatives Sommers, Chair; Fromhold, Vice Chair; Sehlin, Ranking Minority Member; Pearson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Alexander, Anderson, Boldt, Buck, Chandler, Clements, Cody, Conway, Cox, Dunshee, Grant, Hunter, Kagi, Kenney, Kessler, Linville, McDonald, McIntire, Miloscia, Ruderman, Schual-Berke, Sump and Talcott.

Staff: David Pringle (786-7310).

Summary of Recommendation of Committee On Appropriations Compared to Recommendation of Committee On Children & Family Services:

No new changes were recommended.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: This bill will not cost much, and will do a lot of good. The issue is also very timely as many Washington National Guard members are being deployed right now. It will have an impact on the state. The military department supported this bill throughout the policy committee process. The Minuteman fund is never large, and is currently depleted altogether. In working with many families that have had members sent overseas, the Fund is effective. There are strict rules for participation, and right now we have no way to help families in crisis.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Darneille, prime sponsor; and Annie DeAndrea, Washington National Guard Family Programs.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.