

FINAL BILL REPORT

SHB 1189

C 250 L 05

Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Providing relief for indigent veterans and their families.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Local Government (originally sponsored by Representatives Moeller, Bailey, McCoy, Armstrong, Williams, Newhouse, Fromhold, Springer, Ericks, Flannigan, Curtis, Cody, Condotta, Appleton, Hinkle, Morrell, Campbell, Pearson, Chase, Dickerson, Linville, Woods, Kenney, O'Brien, Conway, Lantz, Sells, Kagi, Ormsby, Haigh, Upthegrove, Hasegawa and Kilmer).

House Committee on Local Government

Senate Committee on Government Operations & Elections

Background:

Veterans' Relief - General Provisions

The legislative authority of a county with a city, town, or precinct containing qualifying indigent and suffering veterans or family members must provide funds for the relief of these veterans and family members. Eligibility and procedural criteria must be satisfied and the funds may only be drawn upon by certain officials of qualifying national veterans' organizations (organization officials). "Veteran," for the purposes of this relief provision, includes every person who, at the time he or she seeks certain benefits, has received an honorable discharge or a discharge for physical reasons with an honorable record, subject to statutory requirements.

If a post, camp, or chapter of a qualified national veterans' organization does not exist in any precinct in which it should be granted, the applicable county legislative authority may, if certain criteria are met, accept and pay the orders drawn upon by organization officials located in the nearest city or town.

The commander of any post, camp, or chapter of a qualifying national veterans' organization (commander) must file, prior to relief acts becoming operative, notice with the county auditor that the post, camp, or chapter intends to undertake veterans' relief actions. The notice, which must be filed annually with the auditor, must contain specific information, including a detailed statement of the amount of relief furnished during the preceding year.

The county legislative authority may require that the organization officials post a bond with sufficient and satisfactory sureties for the faithful and honest discharge of veterans' relief duties.

Interment Provisions

The legislative authority in each county must designate a proper authority to ensure the interment of, at the request of a commander, qualifying veterans and family members who die

without leaving sufficient means to defray funeral expenses. The interment must not cost more than a county-established limit, nor less than \$300. Relatives or friends of the deceased may receive the defrayal funds from the county treasurer if specified requirements are met.

Taxation Provisions

County legislative authorities must levy a tax for the purpose of creating the veteran's assistance fund for the relief of qualifying veterans and the indigent wives, husbands, widows, widowers, and minor children of such indigent or deceased veterans. "Veteran" is defined for this provision using a different statutory definition than was referenced above. The funds are to be disbursed by the county legislative authority. The costs incurred in the administration of the fund must be computed by the county treasurer at least annually and such amount may then be transferred from the relief fund to the county current expense fund.

Summary:

Veterans' relief provisions are modified or repealed and new provisions are specified. A summary of the new, amended, and repealed provisions is as follows:

Veterans' Relief - General Provisions

Each county legislative authority (legislative authority) must establish a veterans' assistance program to address the relief needs of qualifying local indigent veterans and their families. The legislative authority must consult with and solicit recommendations from the applicable veterans' advisory board to determine the appropriate services needed for local indigent veterans. Veterans' assistance programs must at least partially be funded by the veterans' assistance fund established in the county.

Legislative authorities may authorize other entities to administer veterans' assistance programs through grants, contracts, or interlocal agreements. If this authorization is exercised, the terms of the grant, contract, or interlocal agreement must specify certain provisions, including the details of the program, the costs and sources of funding, insurance or bond requirements, and the format and frequency of reports. Counties exercising this authorization should, to the extent feasible and consistent with specified relief provisions, ensure that a local branch of a nationally recognized veterans' service organization is the initial point of contact for a veteran or family member seeking assistance.

Counties may authorize the continued operation of veterans' relief or assistance programs existing on January 1, 2005, if the county solicits advice from the applicable veterans' advisory board and satisfies specified grant, contractual, or interlocal agreement requirements.

Veterans' Advisory Board

The legislative authority of each county must establish a veterans' advisory board to advise the authority on the needs of local indigent veterans, the resources available to such veterans, and programs that could benefit the needs of these veterans and their families. Legislative authorities must solicit representatives for the board from either local branches of nationally recognized veterans' service organizations or the veterans' community at large, or both. A majority of the board members must be members from nationally recognized veterans' service

organizations. Only veterans may serve as board members. Service on the board is voluntary, but the county may provide reimbursements for expenses incurred.

Burial and Cremation Provisions

Each legislative authority must designate a proper authority to be responsible, at the expense of the county, for the burial or cremation of any qualifying deceased indigent veteran or family member who died without leaving sufficient means to defray funeral expenses. The burial or cremation may not exceed the limit established by the county nor be less than \$300. Relatives or friends of the deceased may be recipients of the defrayal funds from the county auditor or qualifying chief financial officer if specified requirements are met. Expenses incurred for the burial or cremation of a qualifying deceased veteran or family member must be paid from the veterans' assistance fund.

Financial Provisions and Direct and Indirect Costs

Expenditures from the veterans' assistance fund and interest earned on balances from the fund may only be used for:

- authorized veterans' assistance programs;
- the burial or cremation of a qualifying veteran or family member; and
- qualifying direct and indirect costs incurred in the administration of the fund.

The direct and indirect fund administration costs must be computed by the county auditor or qualifying chief financial officer not less than annually. Following this computation, an amount equal to these costs may then be transferred from the assistance fund to the county current expense fund.

The Department of Social and Health Services must exempt payments provided from veterans' assistance programs when determining eligibility for public assistance.

Repealed Provisions

Statutory provisions pertaining to precincts without veterans' organizations, notifications of intentions to furnish veterans' relief, annual relief statements, and performance bonds are repealed.

Definitions

Definitions of terms pertaining to veterans' relief are specified or modified. Examples include:

- "Veteran" is defined by referencing existing definitions specifying, in part, that the term includes every person who, at the time he or she seeks certain benefits, has received an honorable discharge or a discharge for physical or medical reasons with an honorable record, and who has served in specified capacities.
- "Family" is defined as the spouse, widow, widower, and dependent children of a living or deceased veteran.
- "Indigent" is defined, in part, as a person who is defined as such by the county legislative authority in accordance with specified criteria.

Votes on Final Passage:

House	90	6	
Senate	49	0	(Senate amended)
House	95	0	(House concurred)

Effective: July 24, 2005