

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5499

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Ways & Means, February 7, 2007

Title: An act relating to Washington state patrol survivor benefits.

Brief Description: Providing reimbursement for certain Washington state patrol survivor benefits.

Sponsors: Senators Eide, Schoesler, Kauffman, Swecker, Hatfield, Kilmer, Murray, Haugen, McAuliffe, Rasmussen and Shin.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Ways & Means: 2/07/07, 2/07/07 [DP-TRAN].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Transportation.

Signed by Senators Prentice, Chair; Fraser, Vice Chair, Capital Budget Chair; Pridemore, Vice Chair, Operating Budget; Zarelli, Ranking Minority Member; Brandland, Carrell, Fairley, Hatfield, Hewitt, Hobbs, Honeyford, Keiser, Kohl-Welles, Parlette, Rasmussen, Regala, Roach, Rockefeller, Schoesler and Tom.

Staff: Erik Sund (786-7454)

Background: Retired or disabled employees of the state, school districts, and participating political subdivisions may purchase health care benefits from the Public Employees' Benefits Board (PEBB), administered by the Health Care Authority (HCA). This coverage is purchased at full cost based on the risk pool that the participants belong to, and including administrative costs. Participants eligible for Medicare are placed in one risk pool, and all other retired or disabled participants are placed in a risk pool along with active employees. An explicit subsidy is provided to reduce the premium charges paid by Medicare-eligible participants.

The 2001 Legislature enacted Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1371, which enabled surviving spouses of emergency service personnel killed in the line of duty on or after January 1, 1998, to purchase health care benefits from the PEBB. "Emergency service personnel" for this purpose includes fire fighter and law enforcement members of the Law Enforcement Officers' and Fire Fighters' Retirement System (LEOFF) and the Volunteer Fire Fighters' and Reserve Officers' Relief and Pension System. The cost of the insurance is paid by the surviving spouses and dependent children.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

The 2006 Legislature enacted Senate Bill 6723, which reimburses survivors of all LEOFF 2 members killed in the course of employment for the cost of participating in a PEBB health insurance plan as a benefit from the LEOFF 2 retirement fund. The LEOFF 2 members are not offered a contractual right to reimbursement for the survivor health care insurance costs, and the Legislature reserved the right to amend or repeal the 2006 act in the future.

Summary of Bill: The definition of emergency service personnel for purposes of eligibility to enroll in PEBB health benefit plans is expanded to include surviving spouses and dependent children of members of the Washington State Patrol Retirement System (WSPRS) killed in the line of duty.

Reimbursement for survivor and dependent health benefit premium payments is added to the death benefits provided to survivors of members of the WSPRS killed in the line of duty. Reimbursement of premium payments is not provided to survivors as a contractual right.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Surviving spouses of troopers that are killed in the line of duty should receive the same benefits that surviving spouses already receive in LEOFF 2.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Rick Jensen, Washington State Patrol Troopers Association; Billie Saunders, Washington State Patrol survivor.