

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5608

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As of February 15, 2011

**Title:** An act relating to assistance for student veterans at institutions of higher education.

**Brief Description:** Increasing assistance for student veterans at institutions of higher education.

**Sponsors:** Senators Kilmer, White, Kastama, Shin, Kohl-Welles, Kline and Conway.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Higher Education & Workforce Development: 2/15/11.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

**Staff:** Aldo Melchiori (786-7439)

**Background:** The Post 9/11 GI Bill provides that veterans or schools they attend will receive a percentage, as determined by length of active duty service, of the following (1) an amount of tuition and fees charged, not to exceed the most expensive in-state public institution of higher education. If the tuition and fees at the school attended are higher than the most expensive in-state tuition, the school may choose to participate in the Yellow Ribbon program; (2) a monthly housing allowance equal to the basic allowance for housing amount payable to E-5 with dependents, in the same zip code as the school – Effective October 1, 2011 those enrolled solely in distance learning will receive a housing allowance equal to one-half the national average; (3) a yearly books and supplies stipend of up to \$1000; and (4) a one time payment of \$500 payable to certain individuals relocating from highly rural areas.

In addition, veterans and National Guard members, or their immediate survivors, domiciled in Washington may be eligible for full or partial waivers of tuition and fees at public institutions.

**Summary of Bill:** Western Washington University (WWU) coordinates and participates with Olympic College, Everett Community College, Skagit Valley College, Whatcom Community College, Bellingham Technical College, Northwest Indian College to provide a program that leverages the leadership of returning veterans. WWU is assigned a variety of duties related to identifying resources, developing policies, and providing leadership opportunities. The other participating institutions endeavor to create a full-time veterans staff

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position, provide forums for veterans to connect with other similar students, promote programs that help in the transition to civilian life, and provide targeted planning and counseling services.

Funds are allocated to participating institutions based on the number of veterans receiving services at that institution. WWU reports progress and results to the Legislature on even-numbered years.

**Appropriation:** \$1,970,200.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: Veterans will appreciate these efforts. The state needs to recognize the talent and leadership of returning veterans. By working together, the institutions will be able to make a bigger impact. Forming a coalition is a better way of doing business. We have a growing demand for veteran services. Veterans will get the assistance they need to navigate an unfamiliar system.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Ted Wicorek, Veterans Legislative Coalition; Eileen Coughlin, Sherry Burkey, WWU; Dan Chacom, Olympic Community College.