

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5975

As Reported by House Committee On:
Community Development, Housing & Tribal Affairs

Title: An act relating to the veterans innovations program.

Brief Description: Concerning the veterans innovations program.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Governmental Operations (originally sponsored by Senators Conway, Bailey, Braun, Hobbs, Rolfes and McAuliffe; by request of Department of Veterans Affairs).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Community Development, Housing & Tribal Affairs: 2/26/14 [DP].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Eliminates the Defender's Fund and the Competitive Grant Program from the Veterans Innovations Program (VIP).
- Requires the VIP to provide funding and support to eligible veterans and service members for crisis relief and education, training, and employment opportunities.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, HOUSING & TRIBAL AFFAIRS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Appleton, Chair; Sawyer, Vice Chair; Johnson, Ranking Minority Member; Gregerson, Robinson, Santos and Young.

Staff: Sean Flynn (786-7124).

Background:

In 2006 the Legislature created the Veterans Innovations Program (VIP) within the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) to provide crisis and emergency relief, and education, training, and employment assistance to veterans and their families. The DVA may receive

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gifts, grants, and endowments from public and private sources for the benefit of the VIP. The VIP has its own account from which expenditures may only be used for VIP purposes.

The VIP consists of two separate programs: The Defender's Fund and the Competitive Grant Program. The Defender's Fund provides assistance to veterans returning from Iraq, Afghanistan, or post-9/11 homeland security missions who are experiencing financial hardships due to their time away from home. Veterans eligible under the Defender's Fund may receive a one-time grant of up to \$500.

The Competitive Grant Program funds proposals by veterans through a competitive selection process, based on three categories of need: crisis and emergency relief; education, training, and employment assistance; and community outreach and resources.

Summary of Bill:

The Defender's Fund and the Competitive Grant Program are eliminated within the VIP. Under the VIP, the DVA must provide funding and support to eligible veterans, National Guard members, and members of the Armed Forces reserves for crisis relief and education, training, and employment opportunities. The DVA must establish a process to make veterans and National Guard members and reservists aware of the VIP and to assist them in completing the VIP application.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The VIP provides assistance to veterans, particularly to those transitioning from combat to civilian life, when other sources of assistance are not available. The VIP gives the DVA flexibility in determining the kind of assistance needed to help veterans with employment, travel, and family-related and other emergency needs. The VIP used to be funded through a state raffle, but that source was not sufficient and a permanent funding source was needed to maintain the program.

This bill streamlines the internal administration of the program and allows for more efficient service to veterans. The difference between the Senate and the House version is the repeal of the sunset in 2016. The sunset should be removed because this is one of the best programs that is managed by the DVA.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator MacEwen, prime sponsor; Heidi Audette, Washington Department of Veterans Affairs; and Ezekill Leseke.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.