

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 5691

As Passed Senate, February 10, 2014

Title: An act relating to veterans' homes.

Brief Description: Concerning veterans' homes.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Hewitt, Conway and Rolfes).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Governmental Operations: 2/19/13 [DP].

Ways & Means: 2/26/13, 2/28/13 [DPS].

Passed Senate: 3/08/13, 49-0; 2/10/14, 48-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Roach, Chair; Benton, Vice Chair; Hasegawa, Ranking Member; Braun, Conway, Fraser and Rivers.

Staff: Samuel Brown (786-7470)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5691 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Hill, Chair; Baumgartner, Vice Chair; Honeyford, Capital Budget Chair; Hargrove, Ranking Member; Nelson, Assistant Ranking Member; Keiser, Assistant Ranking Member on the Capital Budget; Ranker, Assistant Ranking Member on the Operating Budget; Bailey, Becker, Braun, Conway, Dammeier, Fraser, Hasegawa, Hatfield, Hewitt, Kohl-Welles, Padden, Parlette, Rivers, Schoesler, Tom and Murray.

Staff: Carma Matti-Jackson (786-7454)

Background: Article X, section 3 of the Washington State Constitution calls for the Legislature to provide for the maintenance of a soldiers' home for honorably discharged Union soldiers, sailors, marines, and members of the state militia disabled while in the line of duty and who are citizens of the state. Currently, the Department of Veterans' Affairs

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operates the state's three veterans' homes: the Washington Soldiers' Home and Colony, located in Orting; the Washington Veterans' Home, located in Retsil; and the Spokane Veterans' Home, located in Spokane.

The Soldiers' Home at Orting was opened in 1891 and has a residential capacity of 183. The Colony, designed to serve eligible veterans and their families residing in the Orting School District, was added in 1905 and has a capacity of 24 members. The Washington Veterans' Home, opened in 1910, has a current resident capacity of 262. The Spokane Veterans' Home opened October 1, 2001, and has 100 skilled-level nursing beds. The Orting and Retsil homes provide three levels of care: domiciliary, assisted-living, and skilled nursing.

Indigent veterans and their spouses or domestic partners are eligible to apply for admission to a state veterans' home. All veterans' homes are Medicare and Medicaid-certified facilities.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The Walla Walla Veterans' home is established and maintained as a branch of the state soldiers' home, and any veterans, veterans' spouses, or parents of children who died while serving in the armed forces may apply for admission.

A veteran or their spouse or domestic partner need not be indigent to apply for admission to a state veterans' home.

Parents of any child who died while serving in the armed forces may be admitted as residents to a state veterans' home.

State veterans' homes are not required to provide both domiciliary and nursing care.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill (Governmental Operations): PRO: We have secured \$22 million in federal funding, and this bill is needed to operate the facility on a site where a veterans' hospital already exists. This will bring 93 full-time jobs to the area, and more during the construction phase. Federal law was recently updated so that if any one of a parent's children were killed in the line of duty, they may be served in a veterans' home.

Persons Testifying (Governmental Operations): PRO: Senator Hewitt, prime sponsor; Heidi Audette, WA Dept. of Veterans' Affairs.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill (Ways & Means): PRO: The facility will serve 80 veterans, spouses, and parents of members of the armed forces who died while on active duty. The home will also bring construction jobs and 93 permanent jobs to the Walla Walla area.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Ted Wicorek, Veterans Legislative Coalition, Heidi Audette, WA State Dept. of Veterans' Affairs.