

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 5975

As Passed Senate, February 17, 2014

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: Governmental Operations: 1/16/14, 1/27/14 [DPS].
Passed Senate: 2/17/14, 46-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5975 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

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

Staff: Samuel Brown (786-7470)

Background: In 2006 the Legislature established the Veterans' Innovations Program (VIP) within the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) to provide crisis and emergency relief as well as education, training, and employment assistance to veterans and their families.

Two separate programs were created within VIP: the Defenders' Fund Program and the Competitive Grant Program. The Defenders' Fund Program allows recent veterans to receive a one-time financial hardship grant of up to \$500 for employment, education, housing, or health care costs. The Competitive Grant Program provides grants to three different types of projects aimed at assisting veterans and their families:

- crisis and emergency relief;
- education, training, and employment assistance; and
- community outreach and resources.

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.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The Defenders' Fund and the Competitive Grant Program within VIP are abolished. Funds appropriated to VIP must be used by WDVA to:

- increase awareness of VIP amongst veterans and active duty service members;
- develop partnerships to assist applicants in completing the VIP application; and
- support veterans and active duty service members in crisis and emergency relief, as well as education, training, and employment assistance.

The provisions that sunset the VIP on June 30, 2016, are removed.

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: PRO: This is a critical program in assisting soldiers. It gives soldiers and their families a fund and helps them readjust. WDVA needs a little more flexibility, and this bill provides that. This bill consolidates two programs that are being accounted separately, creating administrative issues. The Defenders' Fund is not enough to help some veterans, so we need to dip into the Competitive Grant Program. The average expenditure to help a veteran in need is about \$1,300. The Veterans Legislative Coalition supports this bill.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Conway, prime sponsor; Wally Brown, True Grass Roots; Alfie Alvarado, WDVA; Ted Wicorek, Veterans Legislative Coalition.