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**HOUSE BILL 2534**

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**State of Washington 64th Legislature 2016 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Kilduff, Orwall, Muri, McCabe, Appleton, Zeiger, Frame, McBride, Sells, and Bergquist

AN ACT Relating to creating a community care and supportive services program for veterans; adding new sections to chapter 43.60A RCW; creating a new section; and providing an expiration date.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 43.60A RCW to read as follows:

The legislature finds that veterans living in rural and remote areas of the state experience particular barriers in their ability to access federal veterans' benefits and reintegration services and other public services. The legislature further finds that the percentage of veterans in rural or remote areas who are elderly or disabled is higher than in the nonveteran or urban veteran populations, which increases the need for services and care for veterans in those areas. For these reasons, the legislature intends to increase outreach to veterans in rural and remote areas through community and regional programs that can assist veterans in accessing benefits and services. The pilot program created in this act will provide the department of veterans affairs with the resources to examine and recommend ways of working with partners within rural and remote communities to increase access to care and services for veterans.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 43.60A RCW to read as follows:

(1) The department of veterans affairs must select one county veterans' assistance program or community partner to pilot a community care and supportive services program that assists veterans and their families in rural or remote areas that do not have adequate access to federal veterans' benefits and reintegration services and other public services. The department must select the county program by January 1, 2017.

(2) The selection of the county veterans' assistance program or community partner to pilot a community care and supportive services program should be based upon the following assessment:

(a) The current ability of county veteran residents to access federal veterans' benefits and reintegration services and other public services;

(b) The capability of the county veterans' assistance program or community partner to successfully manage the pilot program; and

(c) The projected outcome of success that the pilot program will be able to increase access for veterans to federal veterans' benefits and other public service programs.

(3) The community care and supportive services pilot program must provide assistance for veterans and their families residing in rural or remote areas to increase adequate access to federal veterans' benefits and reintegration services and other public services. The pilot program may include any of the following services:

(a) Assistance in obtaining and coordinating veterans' benefits through the United States veterans administration or other federal agency, including health care services, employment and training services, educational assistance, vocational and rehabilitation counseling, and reintegration services;

(b) Assistance in obtaining and coordinating other public services, including:

(i) Mental health evaluation and treatment, such as suicide prevention, post traumatic stress disorder, and other issues;

(ii) Substance abuse awareness, treatment, and prevention;

(iii) Counseling services in areas such as family support, anger management, personal finances, housing, and employment;

(iv) Domestic violence awareness, protection, and prevention;

(v) Children services;

(vi) Transportation; and

(vii) Other services appropriate to address the needs of veterans and their families; and

(c) Direct assistance of any public service provided by the county or community partner that addresses the particular needs of the veteran population and their families and is otherwise unavailable through existing public or private programs.

(4) By December 1, 2018, in compliance with RCW 43.01.036, the department of veterans affairs must submit a report to the appropriate standing committees in each house of the legislature that evaluates the pilot program in achieving the objective to increase access to federal and other public services for veterans and their families. The report must provide the number of persons served, the number and types of referrals made, the type of outreach conducted, and the availability of resources within the service area. The report also must evaluate the effectiveness of the pilot program as well as provide recommendations on how the program could be improved and whether the program should be continued or expanded.

(5) For purposes of this section, "community partner" means any congressionally chartered or nationally recognized veterans service with at least one active chapter within the state of Washington, or other established organization with capacity to provide services for veterans.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  If specific funding for the purposes of this act is not provided by June 30, 2016, in the omnibus appropriations act, this act is null and void.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  This act expires July 1, 2019.

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