

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2534

As Passed House:
February 11, 2016

Title: An act relating to creating a community care and supportive services program for veterans.

Brief Description: Creating a community care and supportive services program for veterans.

Sponsors: Representatives Kilduff, Orwall, Muri, McCabe, Appleton, Zeiger, Frame, McBride, Sells and Bergquist.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Community Development, Housing & Tribal Affairs: 1/21/16, 1/26/16 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the Department of Veterans Affairs to initiate a pilot program to assist veterans in rural and remote areas with access to benefits and services.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, HOUSING & TRIBAL AFFAIRS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Ryu, Chair; Robinson, Vice Chair; Wilson, Ranking Minority Member; Zeiger, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Appleton, Hickel and Sawyer.

Staff: Sean Flynn (786-7124).

Background:

The federal government provides military veterans with a variety of federal benefits including: disability compensation; education and training; employment services; health care; home loans; life insurance; and pensions. The federal Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) administers many of these benefit programs and provides resources for veterans to access and obtain these benefits.

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.

The Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) administers veterans' benefits provided by the state. Some of these benefit programs include: the Veterans' Assistance Program; the Veterans Innovations Program; the state veterans homes; homeless veterans services and transitional housing; home loans; and home ownership.

Each county is authorized to establish a Veterans' Assistance Program (VAP) to provide services for indigent veterans and their families. Counties have authority to levy a special tax that provides revenue for the VAP through a Veterans' Assistance Fund. The county may delegate administration of the VAP to another entity through a grant, contract, or interlocal agreement. The county must establish a Veterans Advisory Board to provide recommendations on the VAP.

Summary of Bill:

The DVA must select a county VAP or community partner to administer a community care and supportive services pilot program in one county. The county program must be selected by January 1, 2017. A community partner includes any nationally recognized veterans service group with a chapter in the state or other established organization that provides veteran services.

The pilot program must provide assistance for veterans and their families who reside in a rural or remote area of the state. The program must provide assistance to increase access to federal veterans' benefits, reintegration services, and other public services. Such assistance may include:

- coordinating with the federal VA and other federal agencies in obtaining health care, employment, educational, vocational, rehabilitation services;
- coordinating with other public agencies in obtaining services related to mental health, substance abuse, counseling, domestic violence, family services, and transportation;
- providing direct services by the county or community partner that are otherwise unavailable to address the veterans' particular needs.

The selection of the program administrator should be assessed based on the access to veteran resources in the county, the management capabilities of the VAP or community partner, and the projected ability of the program to increase access to services for veterans in the county.

By December 18, 2018, the DVA must prepare and submit a report to the Legislature that evaluates the pilot program and makes recommendations whether the program should be continued or expanded. The report must include the number of persons served, the types of outreach and referrals made, and the availability of resources within the county.

The pilot program expires on date July 1, 2019.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed. However, the bill is null and void unless funded in the budget.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Approximately 20 percent of veterans in the state live in rural or remote areas. Veterans in these areas generally are older and have higher rates of disabilities. This population experiences particular difficulties accessing their benefits and other public services. This program would help to reach out to veterans in these areas to ensure they can benefit from the services that they have earned through their service and sacrifice. The recommendations from this pilot will be considered for expansion to help other veterans in similar circumstances in the state.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Kilduff, prime sponsor; Rex Bruce and Ted Wicorek, Veterans Legislative Coalition.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.