

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 5171

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

Title: An act relating to the definition of veteran for the purposes of the county veterans assistance fund.

Brief Description: Concerning the definition of veteran for the purposes of the county veterans assistance fund.

Sponsors: Senators Bailey, Conway, Hobbs, Hewitt, Angel, Chase and Rolfes.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Community Development, Housing & Tribal Affairs: 3/16/15, 3/23/15 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Bill
(As Amended by Committee)

- Modifies the definitions of "veteran" and "family" for the purposes of the Veterans' Assistance Fund.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, HOUSING & TRIBAL AFFAIRS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Appleton, Chair; Robinson, Vice Chair; Johnson, Ranking Minority Member; Zeiger, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Hawkins, Moscoso and Sawyer.

Staff: Kirsten Lee (786-7133).

Background:

Veteran's Assistance Program.

In 2005 the Legislature required each county to establish a Veteran's Assistance Program (VAP) to provide relief for indigent veterans and their families. Under the VAP, a county must provide funding for qualifying indigent and suffering veterans, or family members. The county must consult with and solicit recommendations from the local veterans' advisory

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board to determine the appropriate services needed for local indigent veterans. Counties also must pay for the burial or cremation costs of indigent veterans and their families.

Veterans' Assistance Fund.

County VAP funding is established in a Veterans' Assistance Fund (Fund). The Legislature has authorized counties to levy taxes for the Fund. The Fund may be used for the VAPs, the burial or cremation of indigent veterans or their families, and direct or indirect costs of the administration of the Fund.

For purposes of qualifying for veterans' assistance funding, "family" means: (1) the spouse or domestic partner; (2) the surviving spouse; (3) the surviving domestic partner; and (4) dependent children, of a living or deceased veteran. The definition of "veteran" includes: (1) active service members who served in an armed conflict; and (2) members of the Armed Forces, Reserves, or National Guard, who received an honorable or medical discharge and have fulfilled their military service obligations. A county may extend VAP services to any service member who has received a general discharge under honorable conditions or a medical discharge. Indigent status is determined by each county, based on public assistance received, income level, or ability to afford basic needs.

Summary of Amended Bill:

The definition of "family" for purposes of the Fund is modified to also apply to spouses, surviving domestic partners, and dependent children of service members who were killed in the line of duty regardless of the number of days served.

The definition of "veteran" is defined solely for the purposes of the Fund as:

1. A person who served in the active military with any branch of service, or was a World War II-era civil service crew member, who meets the following criteria:

- served at least 180 days and was released with military discharge;
- received an honorable discharge or general under honorable characterization of service with a medical reason, regardless of days served; or
- received an honorable discharge and has received a rating for a service connected disability from the United States Department of Veteran's Affairs, regardless of days served.

2. A current member honorably serving in the Armed Forces, Reserves, or National Guard who was activated by presidential call-up for purposes other than training:

- A former member of the Armed Forces, Reserves, or National Guard who:
 - fulfilled his or her initial military service obligation and was released with an honorable discharge;
 - was released before their term ended and was released with an honorable discharge; or
 - received an honorable discharge or honorable under general conditions discharge.

Counties have the discretion to expand the eligibility for purposes of the Fund.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The amended bill: (1) requires former members of the Armed Forces, Reserves, or National Guard who has fulfilled his or her initial military service obligation, for the purposes of receiving the Veterans' Assistance funds, to have been released with an honorable discharge, rather than being released with honorable characterization of service; (2) allows a former member of the Armed Forces, Reserves or National Guard who received a general discharge or honorable under general conditions discharge, to receive Veterans Assistance funds; (3) allows a former member of the Armed Forces, Reserves, or National Guard to receive Veterans' Assistance funds if they were released before their term ended with an honorable discharge; and (4) includes in the counties discretion to determine eligibility for the Fund the ability to allow veterans discharged with any characterization to be eligible.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill is meant to streamline the process of 39 different counties operating the Veterans' Assistance Program in 39 different ways.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Heidi Audette, Washington State Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.