

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESHB 1213

As of February 19, 2016

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: House Committee on Community Development, Housing & Tribal Affairs (originally sponsored by Representatives Orwall, Klippert, MacEwen, Moeller, Hayes, Moscoso, Ormsby, Muri, Kilduff and Tarleton).

Brief History: Passed House: 2/17/16, 98-0.

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Security: 2/22/16.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & SECURITY

Staff: Karen Epps (786-7424)

Background: Each county is authorized to establish a Veterans' Assistance Program (VAP) to provide services for indigent veterans and their families. 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. The Legislature has authorized counties to levy taxes for a Veterans' Assistance Fund (Fund). Expenditures from the Fund and interest earned on Fund balance may only be used for the following purposes:

- the VAP;
- the burial or cremation of a deceased indigent veteran or a deceased family member of an indigent veteran; or
- the direct and indirect costs incurred in the administration of the fund.

The VAP provides relief for indigent veterans and their families. In each county, the Veterans' Advisory Board determines the needs of local indigent veterans and the available resources and programs that could benefit indigent veterans and their families. The definition of veteran includes active service members who have served in an armed conflict and members of the Armed Forces, Reserves, or National Guard who have fulfilled their service obligations and received an honorable or medical discharge. Indigent status is determined by each county, based on one or more of the following factors: public assistance received,

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income level, and the ability to afford basic needs. The family of a veteran is considered the spouse or domestic partner, surviving spouse or domestic partner, and dependent children of an otherwise qualifying living or deceased veteran.

Summary of Bill: The definition of the family of a veteran for Fund purposes is modified to include spouses, surviving domestic partners, and dependent children of service members killed in action, regardless of length of service.

Additionally, the definition of veteran for purposes of the Fund is modified to include any person who served in the active military, or was a World War II-era civil service crew member and meets any of the following criteria:

- at least 180 days of active service, with an honorable discharge;
- receipt of an honorable or general-under-honorable characterization of service with a medical reason for separation, regardless of length of service; or
- receipt of an honorable discharge with a federal Veterans Affairs rating for service-connected disability, regardless of length of service.

The definition of veteran is further modified to include the following:

- a current member of the National Guard or Armed Forces Reserve activated by presidential call-up for non-training purposes; and
- a former National Guard or Armed Forces Reserve member who fulfilled the initial service obligation or was released before their term ended and was released with an honorable characterization of service.

At the discretion of the county legislative authority and in consultation with the Veterans' Advisory Board, a county may expand the eligibility for the purposes of the Fund, which may include serving veterans with additional discharge characterizations.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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