

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5958

As Amended by House, April 14, 2015

Title: An act relating to providing for representation of the state veterans' homes on the governor's veterans affairs advisory committee.

Brief Description: Providing for representation of the state veterans' homes on the governor's veterans affairs advisory committee.

Sponsors: Senators Roach, Liias, Benton, McCoy, Angel and Chase; by request of Department of Veterans Affairs.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Security: 2/19/15 [DP].

Passed Senate: 3/03/15, 48-0.

Passed House: 4/14/15, 97-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & SECURITY

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Roach, Chair; Benton, Vice Chair; Pearson, Vice Chair; Liias, Ranking Minority Member; Dansel, Habib and McCoy.

Staff: Samuel Brown (786-7470)

Background: The Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee (VAAC). The VAAC provides advice and makes recommendations to the Governor and the Director of the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA). The Committee has 17 members appointed by the Governor to serve four-year terms. The VAAC consists of the following:

- one member from the Washington Soldier's Home in Orting and one member from the Veterans' Home in Retsil;
- one member from each of the three congressionally chartered and recognized veterans service organizations with the largest memberships in the state;
- ten members to represent the congressionally chartered and recognized veterans service organizations that have at least one active chapter in the state; and
- two members who are veterans at large.

The Governor must ensure that appointments represent all regions of the state and minority and women's veteran viewpoints.

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.

State Veterans' Homes. The state Constitution mandates that the Legislature provide a soldiers' home for honorably discharged resident soldiers, sailors, and marines who were disabled in the line of duty. DVA manages the veterans' homes and must provide room and board, medical, dental, domiciliary and nursing care, physical and occupational therapy, and recreational activities to residents. There are four veterans' homes in the state:

- the Washington Soldiers' Home in Orting, established in 1980;
- the Washington Veterans' Home in Retsil, established in 1907;
- the Eastern Washington Veterans' Home in Spokane, established in 2001; and
- the Walla Walla Veterans' Home, established in 2014.

Summary of Bill: The two VAAC positions representing the state veterans' homes in Orting and Retsil are eliminated and two more veteran-at-large positions are added.

The VAAC must appoint members to serve as liaisons to each of the state veterans' homes. The veterans' homes liaisons must share information about VAAC business with the resident council of each veterans' home. The liaisons also must ensure that the issues of the veterans' homes residents are included in regular VAAC meetings.

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: PRO: Years ago we had a more ambulatory veterans' home population, and it was easier to have veterans' home representatives attend the meetings. Now we only have domiciliary care and it's difficult to have residents travel to the meetings. We think this will result in much more healthy and productive conversations between homes and the VAAC. This is an outstanding bill and the Veterans Legislative Coalition supports it.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Heidi Audette, WA State Dept. of Veterans Affairs; Ted Wicorek, Veterans Legislative Coalition.

House Amendment(s): Retains the VAAC positions representing the state veterans' homes in Orting and Retsil. If the resident council for either veterans' home does not nominate a resident to represent the home on the VAAC, the Governor may appoint a member-at-large in place of that home's representative. The VAAC must appoint a liaison to any veterans' home with no representative appointed to the committee.