

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2456

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

Title: An act relating to increasing employment opportunities for spouses of military members.

Brief Description: Increasing employment opportunities for spouses of military members.

Sponsors: Representatives Kilduff, McCabe, Orwall, Reeves, Kraft, Senn, Gregerson, Muri, Riccelli, Stanford, Tharinger and Young.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Community Development, Housing & Tribal Affairs: 1/17/18, 1/18/18 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires the departments of Commerce, Employment Security, and Labor and Industries to initiate a campaign to increase employment opportunities for spouses of military members serving on active duty.
- Requires the Department of Employment Security to report increasing participation in unemployment insurance by spouses of military members while on overseas deployment.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, HOUSING & TRIBAL AFFAIRS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Ryu, Chair; Macri, Vice Chair; Barkis, Ranking Minority Member; McCabe, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Jenkin, Reeves and Sawyer.

Staff: Sean Flynn (786-7124).

Background:

Veteran Employment Campaign. In 2015 the Legislature created a campaign, known as "YesVets," to increase veteran employment. The campaign consists of a partnership among

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the departments of Commerce, Employment Security, and Labor and Industries, businesses, association development organizations, and local chambers of commerce across the state, and includes businesses sharing information about veteran employment. The campaign allows businesses to report and receive recognition for hiring veterans.

Unemployment Insurance. The unemployment insurance system provides partial wage replacement benefits for workers who are unemployed through no fault of their own. An individual who quits work to relocate for the employment of a spouse, including a mandatory military transfer, quits work for good cause. An individual is eligible to receive unemployment benefits if he or she:

- worked at least 680 hours in covered employment in his or her base year;
- was separated from employment through no fault of his or her own or quit work for good cause; and
- is able to work and is actively searching for suitable work.

For each week in which an individual files a claim for benefits, he or she must make at least three contacts with employers or participate in three in-person job search activities at the local WorkSource office, or do any combination of three employer contacts or in-person job-search activities.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Military Spouse Employment Campaign. The YesVets program is expanded to include spouses of military members on active duty. The departments of Commerce, Employment Security, and Labor and Industries, must consult with local chambers of commerce, associate development organizations, and businesses to initiate a demonstration campaign to increase employment opportunities for spouses of military members. Such a campaign may include partnerships with chambers of commerce that results in businesses sharing information with the Department of Commerce on the number of military members' spouses employed.

Study on Unemployment Insurance for Military Spouses. The Employment Security Department (Department) must study how the unemployment insurance program can provide greater opportunities for the spouses of military members to participate in the program while on overseas deployment with their military spouse. The Department must confer with relevant state and federal agencies on the labor market and job resources for spouses on overseas military base, including opportunities to work remotely and resources available on military bases that can assist with remote work opportunities.

By December 1, 2019, the Department must report to the Governor, the Legislature, and the Joint Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs, on how to implement the study. The report should include any proposed legislation that may be required to comply with federal regulations. The study and report must be conducted within existing resources.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

Military spouses are included within the scope of the YesVets campaign. A technical change is made, referring to overseas reassignment, rather than deployment.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute 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) Spouses of military members serve this country alongside their military spouse. They must travel around the world as part of the spouse's military assignments and frequently relocate to different bases. These transitions have a dramatic impact on military families and requires great sacrifices on the part of the spouses of the military members. Data shows the significant costs of transfers on military families, including increase rates of unemployment and other related hardships. In addition, military spouses experience employment discrimination when trying to find jobs at new locations. Employers will not consider hiring military spouses due to the perception that military members will not last long on the job because of the potential of transferring.

This bill uses the successful YesVets program as an existing model to help military spouses employment opportunities. YesVets is no-cost program that has a positive impact on hiring opportunities for veterans. Expanding the program will be helpful for military spouses.

The bill also helps to address employment problems of spouses on overseas assignment. While unemployment due to transfers within the country are eligible for unemployment insurance, federal rules do not recognize eligibility for overseas transfers.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Kilduff, prime sponsor; Whitney Stafford; Ted Wicorek, Veterans' Legislative Coalition; Lisa Mannion; and Nick Strueli, Employment Security Department.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.