

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## SB 5525

---

### As Reported by House Committee On: Higher Education

**Title:** An act relating to veterans' mental health services at institutions of higher education.

**Brief Description:** Concerning veterans' mental health services at institutions of higher education.

**Sponsors:** Senators Wilson, Palumbo, Cleveland, Baumgartner, Zeiger, O'Ban, Lias, Frockt, Schoesler, Hobbs, Kuderer, Conway and Bailey.

#### **Brief History:**

##### **Committee Activity:**

Higher Education: 2/20/18, 2/23/18 [DPA].

#### **Brief Summary of Bill (As Amended by Committee)**

- Requires the Department of Veteran Affairs (DVA) to consult with an entity at the University of Washington School of Social Work with expertise in suicide prevention to gather data on veterans and the mental health resources available to those veterans at the public four-year higher education institutions.
- Requires the DVA to coordinate with the public four-year higher education institutions to ensure each has a licensed mental health counselor with training in posttraumatic stress disorder available to work exclusively with veterans and their dependents.

---

### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

**Majority Report:** Do pass as amended. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Hansen, Chair; Pollet, Vice Chair; Holy, Ranking Minority Member; Van Werven, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Haler, Orwall, Sells, Stambaugh and Tarleton.

**Staff:** Megan Mulvihill (786-7304).

#### **Background:**

---

*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.*

### Resources for Veterans in Public Institutions of Higher Education.

Applications for admission to an institution of higher education (IHE) must provide the opportunity for applicants to indicate if they are veterans who need assistance. The IHEs must also participate in outreach activities to increase the number of veterans who receive institutional waivers of tuition and fees. Each IHE has a center for veterans and their families, typically called a veteran resource center. The centers generally provide information regarding federal and state education benefits, specialized advising and tutoring services, referrals to support services, and social activities.

### Licensing for Mental Health Counselors.

The Department of Health licenses mental health counselors. Requirements for receiving licensure include:

- graduation from a master's or doctoral level educational program in mental health counseling, or a related discipline, from an approved IHE;
- successful completion of an approved examination; and
- successful completion of an approved supervised full-time counseling experience at least 36 months in length.

Licenses for mental health counseling must be renewed every year, and every two years 36 hours of continuing education must be completed for renewal.

---

### **Summary of Bill:**

The Department of Veteran Affairs (DVA) must consult with an entity at the University of Washington's School of Social Work that has expertise in suicide prevention to gather data on the number of veterans at each of the public four-year IHEs and the mental health resources available to those veterans in order to identify gaps in mental health services for veterans. Based on the data and identified gaps, the DVA must collaborate with the public four-year IHEs to ensure each one has a licensed mental health counselor with training in posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) available to work exclusively with student, faculty, and staff veterans, as well as their spouses and dependents, through the institution's veteran resource center. The licensed mental health counselor may be employed by the IHE and receive training in PTSD from the DVA or may be a counselor contracted through the DVA. The DVA must leverage private, local, and federal dollars when possible to implement the act.

### **Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill:**

The amended bill puts the DVA in charge of ensuring each IHE has a licensed mental health counselor with training in PTSD, and allows the counselor to be an employee of the IHE or a contracted counselor rather than requiring the IHE to employ a full-time counselor. In addition, the DVA is charged with consulting with an entity at the University of Washington School of Social Work that has expertise in suicide prevention in order to gather data on veterans and mental health resources at the IHEs.

---

**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) There are over 5,300 veterans and family members at the four-year institutions of higher education. Statistics show that veterans are at a far greater risk for suicide and depression, and there are negative health effects related to deployments. Veterans have different needs than other college students, so a mental health counselor specific for veterans should be funded for each of the colleges.

The colleges have veteran resource centers, but there are long wait times. A 30 day wait is unacceptable. Veterans could receive more timely services if they go to a counselor on campus rather than a federal counselor through the DVA. If this could be expanded to community and technical colleges in the future, that would be wonderful.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) A health impact review, which is an evidence-based analysis of a legislative proposal completed by the Department of Health, found strong evidence for improving mental health outcomes and improving disparities among these populations.

**Persons Testifying:** (In support) Senator Wilson, prime sponsor; Jerry Fugich, Veterans Legislative Coalition; Ernie Tao, University of Washington; Seth Dawson, Washington State Psychiatric Association and Washington Association for Substance Abuse and Violence Prevention; and Leah Mobley, Associated Students of Central Washington University

(Other) Alexandra Montano, Washington State Board of Health; and Alfie Alvarado, Washington Department of Veterans Affairs.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.