

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5849

As Amended by House, April 11, 2017

Title: An act relating to veterans' services.

Brief Description: Addressing the need for veterans' services.

Sponsors: Senators Angel, Bailey, Rolfes, Braun, Brown, Sheldon, Pearson, Becker, Fortunato, Wilson, Palumbo, O'Ban, Warnick and Conway.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Ways & Means: 2/23/17, 2/24/17 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed Senate: 3/02/17, 49-0.

Passed House: 4/11/17, 98-0.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs to offer training and support for volunteers interested in providing peer-to-peer support to other veterans.
- Directs the Office of Financial Management to develop a military recruitment program that recognizes veterans' experience.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Braun, Chair; Brown, Vice Chair; Rossi, Vice Chair; Honeyford, Vice Chair, Capital Budget ; Ranker, Ranking Minority Member; Rolfes, Assistant Ranking Minority Member, Operating Budget; Frockt, Assistant Ranking Minority Member, Capital Budget; Bailey, Becker, Billig, Conway, Darneille, Fain, Hasegawa, Keiser, Miloscia, Pedersen, Rivers, Schoesler, Warnick and Zeiger.

Staff: Amanda Cecil (786-7460)

Background: According to the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA), Washington is home to more than 598,000 veterans, 60,000 active duty, 19,000 guard and reserves, and 2 million family members. WDVA administers a number of programs and

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services for veterans related to behavior health, education and training, and employment. In 2015, WDVA received an Abraham Lincoln Pillars of Excellence Award for successfully transitioning veterans from active duty to civilian life. The state of Texas also received an award for implementing a multi-agency collaborative program that began developing mental health services for veterans and their families in 2009 using peer-to-peer counseling services. Thirty-five volunteer coordinators recruited more than 1000 volunteers and trained 986 volunteers in peer support skills, providing statewide coverage. Coordinators and volunteers are charged with identifying mental health resources in their communities that could play a role in meeting a veteran's needs.

The Department of Enterprise Services (DES) administers a veterans' preference in hiring for state employment that provides up to 10 percent preference points on tests results. The Office of Financial Management (OFM) was directed in Executive Order 13-01 to set standards for agency plans and develop agency resources for transitioning service members.

Summary of Bill: WDVA is directed to offer training and support for volunteers interested in providing peer-to-peer support to other veterans.

OFM is directed to work with WDVA, DES, and other interested stakeholders to develop a military recruitment program. The program must provide credit to veterans for knowledge, skills, and leadership abilities. Program development must include, but is not limited to, identifying:

- public and private military recruitment programs and ways those programs can be used in Washington;
- similar military and state job classes and develop a system to provide veterans with experience credit for similar work; and
- barriers to state employment and opportunities to better utilize veterans' experience.

OFM must report to the Legislature with a draft plan by January 1, 2018.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: None.

Persons Testifying: No one.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.

EFFECT OF HOUSE AMENDMENT(S):

- Requires the WDVA to report to the Legislature, by December 31, 2018, on the effectiveness of the peer-to-peer support program.

- Directs OFM to consult with the Veterans Employee Resource Group and the Washington State Military Transition Council in developing the military recruitment program.
- Changes reference from "war-related" to "combat-related" conditions in regards to service-related treatment and counseling programs.
- Changes reference from "mental health" to "behavioral health" professionals in regards to training primary care professionals on service-related stress and trauma.