

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5428

As Reported by House Committee On: College & Workforce Development

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: Senate Committee on Higher Education & Workforce Development (originally sponsored by Senators Wilson, L., Palumbo, Becker, Brown, Wagoner, Warnick, Nguyen and Zeiger).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

College & Workforce Development: 3/19/19, 3/26/19 [DP].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires the public baccalaureate institutions to employ at least one full-time mental health counselor with experience and training working with active duty military and veterans.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COLLEGE & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 16 members: Representatives Hansen, Chair; Entenman, Vice Chair; Leavitt, Vice Chair; Van Werven, Ranking Minority Member; Gildon, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Graham, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Kraft, Mead, Paul, Pollet, Ramos, Rude, Sells, Slatter and Sutherland.

Staff: Megan Mulvihill (786-7304).

Background:

Resources for Veterans in Public Institutions of Higher Education.

Higher education institutions must provide on admission's applications the opportunity for applicants to indicate if they are veterans who need assistance. The institutions must also participate in outreach activities to increase the number of veterans who receive tuition

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waivers. Each institution 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.

Mental Health Counselors.

A mental health counselor is someone who applies principles of human development, learning theory, psychotherapy, group dynamics, and etiology of mental illness and dysfunction behavior to individuals, families, groups, or organizations, for the purpose of treating mental disorders and promoting optimal mental health functionality. Mental health counselors must have: (1) a master's or doctoral level degree in mental health counseling; (2) completed state examination requirements; and (3) a minimum of 36 months of full-time supervised counseling.

Summary of Bill:

Subject to appropriation, the public baccalaureate institutions must employ at least one full-time, licensed mental health counselor with experience and training specific to working with active duty military and veterans. The counselor must be accessible through, but not necessarily located in, the institution's veteran resource center. The counselor must prioritize working with student veterans, and the institution's veteran resource center must make available information about other agencies' mental health services to veterans, spouses, and dependents.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Across the United States, on average, every day there are 20 veterans that attempt or commit suicide. Washington has one of the highest rates of unmet mental health need. Last year, due to an inability to secure funding, the University of Washington had to use funds from services and activities fees to provide a veteran counselor. When a dedicated therapist started at the University of Washington, the number of veterans receiving assistance doubled. Eastern Washington University (EWU) has been recognized as a top school for veterans and at any one time EWU has over 400 veterans or active duty military on campus. Demand across the board for mental health services is increasing and having a dedicated counselor helps to remove the stigma around veterans seeking mental health services.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) The health impact review found evidence that if the institutions employ at least one mental health counselor it would increase access and use. The review also determined that a counselor with experience with the military might increase use, and overall, increasing access to these services would improve mental health outcomes for veterans and decrease health disparities.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Ted Wicorek, Veterans Legislative Coalition; Lucas Garcia, University of Washington; and Austin Quinn, Eastern Washington University.

(Other) Lindsay Herendeen, State Board of Health.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.