

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5049

As of February 6, 2019

Title: An act relating to the creation of a property tax exemption for spouses of military members or first responders killed in the line of duty.

Brief Description: Concerning the creation of a property tax exemption for spouses of military members or first responders killed in the line of duty.

Sponsors: Senators O'Ban, Conway, Fortunato, Palumbo and Wagoner.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: State Government, Tribal Relations & Elections: 2/06/19.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates a lifetime property tax exemption for residences owned by persons whose spouses were killed in the line of duty, either in the military or as a first responder.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, TRIBAL RELATIONS & ELECTIONS

Staff: Jarrett Sacks (786-7448)

Background: Property Tax. All real and personal property in Washington is subject to the property tax each year based on its value, unless a specific exemption is provided by law. The tax is determined by multiplying the assessed value by the tax rate for each taxing district in which the property is located.

Dependency and Indemnity Compensation. Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC), administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs, is a monetary benefit paid to eligible survivors, such as spouses, of military service members who died in the line of duty, or eligible survivors of veterans whose death resulted from a service-related injury or disease. DIC ends upon remarriage unless the surviving spouse remarries after 2003 and is at least fifty-seven years old.

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.

Duty-Related Death Benefit. A duty-related death benefit is a one-time payment to designated survivors, such as spouses, of members of the Washington State Law Enforcement Officer's and Firefighters' Retirement System who die as the result of injuries sustained during the course of employment or an occupational disease or infection that arose from employment. Members of the retirement system include firefighters, law enforcement officers, and emergency medical technicians.

Death Benefit for Volunteer Firefighters and Reserve Officers. A death benefit for volunteer firefighters and reserve officers is a one-time payment to the widows or widowers of members of the Washington Volunteer Firefighters' and Reserve Officers' Relief and Pensions System who die as the result of injuries or sickness resulting from the performance of their duties. Members of the system include emergency medical technicians, volunteer firefighters, and reserve officers not covered under other state retirement systems.

Special Death Benefit for Washington State Patrol. A special death benefit for Washington State Patrol (WSP) members is a one-time payment to designated survivors, such as spouses, of WSP members who die as the result of injuries sustained during the course of employment or an occupational disease or infection that arose from employment.

Summary of Bill: Spousal Survivors. The bill provides a property tax exemption for the primary residence owned by people—spousal survivors—whose spouses were killed in the line of duty. Spousal survivors are defined as recipients of DIC or the recipients of Washington State duty-related benefits for firefighters, volunteer firefighters, law enforcement, and WSP members. Eligibility is limited to spousal recipients of these benefits. Eligibility continues after remarriage.

Residence. The property tax exemption only applies to the spousal survivor's primary residence, and only to a residence owned in fee, as a life estate, by contract purchase, or as a share in cooperative housing. The property tax exemption may be transferred to a new residence. Confinement to a hospital, nursing home, assisted living facility, or adult family home does not disqualify the spousal survivor from continuing to claim the property tax exemption so long as the residence is either temporarily unoccupied, occupied by a spouse or someone financially dependent on the spousal survivor, or rented for the purpose of paying for the nursing home.

Though the property tax exemption is permanent, recipients must renew their application at least once every six years.

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: PRO: Families have to live with the ramifications of losing a loved one in the line-of-duty; the bill expresses gratitude by the state for the sacrifice

they made. The state has no other tangible way to express gratitude, and the state owes those families. It is a small price to pay compared to the ultimate sacrifice made by those who die in the line of duty.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Steve O'Ban, Prime Sponsor; Adam Rosenlund, citizen.

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