

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5428

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As of February 1, 2019

**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, L., Palumbo, Becker, Brown, Wagoner, Warnick, Nguyen and Zeiger.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Higher Education & Workforce Development: 1/31/19.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Requires public baccalaureate institutions to each employ a full-time mental health counselor with experience and training related to working with active members of the military or military veterans.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

**Staff:** Kellee Gunn (786-7429)

**Background:** Veteran Supportive Campuses Certificate Program. In 2009, the Governor and state agencies jointly signed a Partners for Veteran Supportive Campuses Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to support veteran-related education goals. On November 21, 2014, the Governor and state agencies signed an updated version of the MOU.

Under the MOU, college campuses, including community and technical colleges, may apply for a Partner for Veteran Supportive Campus Certificate. The certificate acknowledges the schools' commitment to support post-secondary education for veterans.

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.

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Mental health counselors must have a master's or doctoral level degree in mental health counseling, and have completed state examination requirements and a minimum of 36 months of full-time supervised counseling.

**Summary of Bill:** Subject to appropriation, the public baccalaureates must each employ a full-time mental health counselor who has experience and training specifically related to working with active members of the military or military veterans. The mental health counselor shall prioritize working with military or military veteran students, faculty, and staff and their family members. The counselor must be accessible through, but not necessarily in, the institution's veterans resource center.

**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: This bill has passed off the Senate floor before with full support. Student veterans have unique issues. The veterans' administration has the ability to do this, but there is a time issue. These student veterans cannot wait 30 days to get help. This bill provides a counselor at every school. There are thousands of veterans attending higher education in this state. Mental health resources are generally inadequate on our campuses. Last year, due to inadequate state funding, the UW counseling center had to dip into S&A fees to secure a counselor for the Office of Student Vet Life. Washington has one of the highest of unmet needs of mental health in the country. The state should start funding this position at UW, and fund it at all schools statewide because a student veteran's mental health should not depend on what school they attend. Central Washington University (CWU) has the highest number of veterans of any public comprehensive four-year university in the United States. The past three years, there has been a 240 percent increase of students asking for mental health services at CWU. The funding model right now is not sustainable in relationship to the veterans who need help. Having a counselor available on all campuses improves overall mental health.

OTHER: The health impact review found evidence that if the institutions of higher education provide counselors it would increase access to and the use of mental health services. Increasing access to these services would improve mental health outcomes for veterans overall and decrease health disparities.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Lynda Wilson, Prime Sponsor; Kelsey Hood, Vice President of External Affairs for UW GPSS; Lukas Garcia, Director of Legislative Affairs for ASUW Seattle; Ted Wicorek, Veterans Legislative Coalition; Samantha Powers, University of Washington; Ying Ye, University of Washington; Charles Adkins, Director of Legislative Affairs, Geoduck Student Union of the Evergreen State College; Antonio Sanchez, Central Washington University.

OTHER: Lindsay Herendeen, State Board of Health.

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