

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 1869

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Innovation, Community & Economic Development, & Veterans

**Title:** An act relating to keeping our Washington guard strong act.

**Brief Description:** Enacting the keeping our Washington guard strong act.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Leavitt, Maycumber, Ryu, Graham, Christian, Rule, Couture, Bronoske, Slatter, Chambers, Reeves, Reed, Chapman, Ormsby, Barnard, Timmons, Sandlin, Orwall, Goodman, Caldier, Riccelli, Hackney, Shavers and Griffey.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Innovation, Community & Economic Development, & Veterans: 1/10/24, 1/16/24 [DP].

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Provides a referral bonus for a National Guard member whose successful recruitment results in an enlistment contract.
- Provides a reenlistment bonus to a National Guard member who extends his or her service for at least two years.

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**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON INNOVATION, COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, & VETERANS**

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 15 members: Representatives Ryu, Chair; Donaghy, Vice Chair; Rule, Vice Chair; Volz, Ranking Minority Member; Barnard, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Caldier, Chambers, Christian, Cortes, Paul, Senn, Shavers, Street, Waters and Wilcox.

**Staff:** Martha Wehling (786-7067).

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

## **Background:**

### The State Militia.

The Washington Constitution provides for the organization of the state militia. The Governor serves as Commander in Chief, and with the advice and consent of the Senate, appoints an adjutant general, who is Chief of Staff to the Governor and is the executive head of the militia.

The organized militia consists of the National Guard and the State Guard. The National Guard is the military force of Washington that is organized, equipped, and federally recognized under the National Defense Act. The Adjutant General commands the National Guard and recruits, trains, maintains, and administers the organized militia.

The Governor may order the organized militia into active service to execute Washington's laws or perform duties the Governor deems proper in certain circumstances or in imminent belief of those circumstances, including war, insurrection, rebellion, invasion, tumult, riot, mob, organized violence, or public disaster. The organized militia may also be ordered into active service to enforce controlled substances statutes, prepare for or recover from the specified circumstances, or when otherwise required for public health, safety, or welfare, including failure of responsible civil authorities to preserve law and order or protect life or property.

### National Guard Enlistment.

National Guard enlistment must conform with the federal Department of Defense laws and regulations, which specify the term and the minimum and maximum age for original (new) recruits and reenlistment. A recruit to the National Guard must also be a United States citizen or permanent resident, meet certain educational requirements, achieve a minimum score on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test, and meet certain medical, physical, and moral requirements.

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## **Summary of Bill:**

### Referral Incentive Program.

A National Guard member may identify an appropriate recruitment prospect to the Military Department. If the prospect enters into an enlistment contract for entry or reentry into the National Guard, a "completed accession," the referring member may receive a referral bonus in an amount up to \$500. The Adjutant General will set the bonus amount each calendar year. Current members of the National Guard, command or senior enlisted advisors, and members with recruitment duties are ineligible for the referral program.

### Reenlistment Bonus Program.

A National Guard member who extends his or her term of service is eligible for a reenlistment bonus. The amount of the bonus must encourage reenlistment for a term greater than two years. Eligibility is limited to members whose service was deemed satisfactory by the Adjutant General and who are not eligible for a federal reenlistment bonus. The Adjutant General shall establish the program, may determine additional eligibility criteria, and must specify all the criteria in policy.

The Military Department must determine and publish the bonus payment schedule. If the reenlisting member fails to complete the reenlistment term, the Military Department may seek to recover a prorated amount of the bonus.

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**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) Our National Guard began as a strategic reserve, but is increasingly called on as a pivotal operational partner. The 8,000 members are part-time soldiers and airmen who have other jobs, families, and are our neighbors. Over the last several years, they have responded to wildfires, floods, and, during the pandemic, helped with testing and vaccination centers, workforce shortages in hospitals, and food distribution. During 2020, nearly every member was on duty either overseas or in Washington. When activated, the members are away from their families and civilian jobs, which makes it difficult to recruit and retain members. Many residents are grateful when they see the National Guard members in the community. National Guard members are also unique in that they serve both the President and the Governor, and can be called to serve outside of the state.

There is a nationwide recruiting crisis, and other states offer recruitment and retention bonuses because they recognize the importance of retaining a strong National Guard and the success of private sector referral programs with financial incentives. Washington has not met its personnel number mandates during the last five years, despite lots of effort. While the National Guard has met both its federal and state mission requirements to respond to disasters, it is about 400 members short and it would be easier to meet those requirements if the National Guard was full strength. Most of the members are eligible for a federal reenlistment bonus, but a small percentage are not. Washington wants to keep all mid-grade service members because they are critical to success. To keep the National Guard strong, prepared, and resilient, it is important that there are sufficient members who are ready to

serve. Referral and recruitment bonuses are a solution to a workforce challenge, so that Washington does not lose members to adjacent states and the Department of Defense does not reassign units to other states with better recruitment and retention or eliminate some of the programs like cyber, engineering, or electronic security. Other state agencies use bonuses, like the Washington State Patrol. The bonuses are significant to the individual service members and their families, and are based on model legislation and align with best practices for recruiting and retention in the public and private sectors.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Representative Mari Leavitt, prime sponsor; Allen Acosta, Veteran Legislative Coalition; Bret Daugherty, Washington Military Department; and Charles Barnett, National Guard Association of Washington.

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