

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5358

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As of January 25, 2023

**Title:** An act relating to expanding veterans' services and programs.

**Brief Description:** Expanding veterans' services and programs.

**Sponsors:** Senators Gildon, Nobles, Conway, Holy, Lovelett, Nguyen, Randall, Torres, Wagoner, Wellman, Wilson, C. and Wilson, L..

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** State Government & Elections: 1/27/23.

### Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs to submit reports to the Legislature to determine the effectiveness of the veterans service officer program, and the veteran peer-to-peer training and support program in meeting veterans' needs.
- States legislative intent to double appropriations for the programs, prioritizing smaller counties and counties with below-average rates of veterans receiving federal benefits.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & ELECTIONS

**Staff:** Megan Tudor (786-7478)

**Background:** Veterans in Washington State. According to the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA), Washington is home to more than 555,000 veterans, 62,000 active duty, 18,000 guard and reserves, and 2 million family members. WDVA administers a number of programs and services for veterans related to behavioral health, education and training, and employment.

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Veteran Peer-to-Peer Program. In 2017, the Washington Legislature directed WDVA to offer training and support for volunteers interested in providing peer-to-peer support to other veterans. This legislation directed the Office of Financial Management to work with WDVA, the Department of Enterprise Services, and other stakeholders to develop a program to recruit veterans for state employment opportunities.

Veteran Service Officer Program. The Legislature established the Veterans Service Officer Program, and associated funding in 2019. This program provides funding to underserved counties, with a population of 100,000 or less, to establish and maintain a veterans service officer within the county.

**Summary of Bill:** Veteran Peer-to-Peer Program. The bill updates the due date of the peer-to-peer training and support report to be submitted by WDVA to September 30, 2024. The information required in the report is updated to add an analysis of areas in the state that do not have veteran support services, and WDVA recommendations for the expansion of these services to these areas.

Veteran Service Officer Program. WDVA is directed to evaluate, and provide a report to the Legislature by September 30, 2024, regarding the effectiveness of the veterans service officer program in addressing veterans' needs in the state. The report must include information on the number of veterans receiving services, the location of these services, and an analysis on areas in the state lacking services.

Appropriations and Grants. The Legislature intends to double state appropriations for veterans service officer and peer mentoring programs and WDVA will provide grants to counties for development and expansion of these programs, subject to availability of appropriations. WDVA must give grant priority to counties with smaller populations and counties below the national average of federal disability or pension compensation of veterans.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 20, 2023.

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

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