

# FINAL BILL REPORT

## SSB 5358

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Synopsis as Enacted

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

**Sponsors:** Senate Committee on State Government & Elections (originally sponsored by Senators Gildon, Nobles, Conway, Holy, Lovelett, Nguyen, Randall, Torres, Wagoner, Wellman, Wilson, C. and Wilson, L.).

**Senate Committee on State Government & Elections**

**Senate Committee on Ways & Means**

**House Committee on Innovation, Community & Economic Development, & Veterans**

**House Committee on Appropriations**

**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.

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:** Veteran Peer-to-Peer Program. The due date of the peer-to-peer training and support report to be submitted by WDVA is updated to September 30, 2024. An analysis of areas in the state that do not have veteran support services, and WDVA recommendations

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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.*

for expansion of these services to these areas is required in the report.

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 increase 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.

**Votes on Final Passage:**

Senate 48 0

House 97 0

**Effective:** July 23, 2023