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**SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 1161**

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**State of Washington 69th Legislature 2025 Regular Session**

**By** House Postsecondary Education & Workforce (originally sponsored by Representatives Ryu, Obras, Paul, Davis, Ormsby, and Hill)

AN ACT Relating to establishing the veteran employability training and career advancement for reentry program; adding a new chapter to Title 28B RCW; and providing an expiration date.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The definitions in this section apply throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(1) "College board" means the state board for community and technical colleges created in chapter 28B.50 RCW.

(2) "Community college" has the same meaning as in RCW 28B.50.030.

(3) "Correctional facility" has the same meaning as defined in RCW 72.09.015.

(4) "Department" means the department of corrections.

(5) "Immediate family" has the same meaning as defined in RCW 72.09.015.

(6) "Justice involved" has the same meaning as "inmate" as defined in RCW 72.09.015 and includes currently or formerly incarcerated individuals and defendants participating in pretrial diversion programs 18 to 24 months in length in Pierce, King, or Snohomish county.

(7) "Participant" means an eligible justice involved veteran who has been approved and accepted to participate in the program.

(8) "Program" means the veteran employability training and career advancement for reentry program created in section 2 of this act.

(9) "Veteran" means any person who, regardless of discharge, has served in any branch of the armed forces of the United States.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) Subject to amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the veteran employability training and career advancement for reentry program is established within the college board to provide individualized transitional and soft skills to justice involved veterans and their families to improve economic well-being, reduce recidivism, prevent homelessness, improve reintegration, and provide a workforce that is educated and trained for living-wage careers of the 21st century.

(2) In administering the program, the college board shall select one community college west of the crest of the Cascade mountain range to participate in the program by serving participants. Community colleges with demonstrated records of providing similar services must be prioritized.

(3) The selected community college shall:

(a) In partnership with the employment security department and local WorkSource office, make use of available programs, courses, and methods to deliver transitional employment and reentry readiness materials to participants; and

(b) Employ a full-time equivalent reentry and educational navigator to determine eligibility and, in collaboration with the department, establish contact with eligible justice involved veterans. The navigator shall provide participants individualized transitional reentry and employment readiness services including, where applicable:

(i) Requesting written permission from participants to contact and offer services to their immediate family;

(ii) Conducting intensive intake interviews with participants and approved immediate family;

(iii) Verifying eligibility by obtaining proof of military service in any branch of the armed forces of the United States;

(iv) Collaborating with the department and other relevant agencies to deliver individualized prerelease programs through correspondence, approved textbooks, or core curriculum objectives;

(v) In partnership with the employment security department and local WorkSource office, assisting in preparing and updating program-specific individualized transitional reentry and employment readiness plans based on assessment scores of the employment readiness scale;

(vi) In collaboration with the department, assisting in developing a postrelease transitional support system with timely and measurable steps that supports a participant's transitional reentry and employment readiness plan created in (b)(v) of this subsection;

(vii) Providing approved immediate family support services outlined in section 3 of this act;

(viii) Conducting regular virtual or in-person check-ins to measure progress of soft skills development;

(ix) Assisting with career development skills; and

(x) Utilizing funding from federal, state, and local agencies including the federal workforce innovation and opportunity act and WorkSource partners to support participants or their immediate family.

(4) To be eligible for services under the program, an individual must:

(a) Be a justice involved veteran:

(i) Within 24 months of release from incarceration or within 24 months postincarceration; or

(ii) Participating in a pretrial diversion program 18 to 24 months in length in Pierce, King, or Snohomish county;

(b) Complete the employment readiness scale biannually to measure self-efficacy and outcome expectancy; and

(c) Complete a career research project.

NEW SECTION. **Sec. .** (1) Subject to amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the college board and the selected community college shall collaborate with the department of veterans affairs to develop eligibility criteria for approved immediate family of participants to receive funds to assist in:

(a) Rental support not to exceed $1,000 per month up to 12 months paid directly to the landlord, housing provider, or mortgage holder;

(b) Food assistance not to exceed $500 per month up to six months;

(c) Driver's license fees including unpaid fines, auto insurance premiums, auto registration fees, public transportation, and auto repair expenses not to exceed $1,000 within 24 months; and

(d) Purchasing work appropriate clothing and training certificates not to exceed $1,500 within 24 months.

(2) No funds allocated under subsection (1) of this section may be used for unpaid child support or legal financial obligation fines.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  Subject to amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the department shall:

(1) Develop and implement processes by which it can identify and approve participation of any qualifying justice involved veterans incarcerated in a correctional facility or under department supervision in the program;

(2) Assist participants incarcerated in a correctional facility with receiving correspondence, textbooks, and other curriculum; and

(3) Document participation of justice involved veterans incarcerated in a correctional facility in the program to ensure sufficient recordkeeping and facilitate uninterrupted participation in the program in the event a participant is transferred to another correctional facility.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) Subject to amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the department of veterans affairs shall:

(a) Assign two full-time equivalent veteran service officers or staff members trained in the benefits available to veterans to collect data on veterans entering a correctional facility and veterans under department supervision; and

(b) Share data collected under (a) of this subsection with the college board and the selected community college.

(2) A national veterans organization may provide the veteran service officers or staff members assigned in subsection (1)(a) of this section.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  An interagency work group of the college board, the department of veterans affairs, the employment security department, and the selected community college is created to analyze the feasibility of expanding the program statewide. By December 1, 2025, the work group must submit a report of its findings and recommendations to the legislature pursuant to RCW 43.01.036.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  In compliance with RCW 43.01.036, the college board, in collaboration with the selected community college, the employment security department, and the department of veterans affairs, shall report to the legislature by November 1, 2025, and by July 1st annually thereafter on:

(1) The number of participants and immediate family participating in the program;

(2) The level of educational attainment of participants;

(3) Employment statistics of participants;

(4) Recidivism rates of participants; and

(5) The nature and extent of assistance participants received under the program.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  Sections 1 through 7 of this act expire August 1, 2031.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  Sections 1 through 8 of this act constitute a new chapter in Title 28B RCW.

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