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**SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 1102**

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**State of Washington**

**69th Legislature**

**2025 Regular Session**

**By** House Technology, Economic Development, & Veterans (originally sponsored by Representatives Shavers, Ryu, Leavitt, Callan, Simmons, Goodman, Wylie, Nance, Fosse, and Reeves)

READ FIRST TIME 01/23/25.

1 AN ACT Relating to increasing support and services for veterans;  
2 amending RCW 43.60A.230; adding a new section to chapter 43.60A RCW;  
3 and creating a new section.

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

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds that veterans are  
6 eligible for state and federal benefits, but may be unaware of those  
7 benefits or the process to apply for them. Veterans service officers  
8 serve a critical role in assisting veterans and their families with  
9 identifying and applying for federal benefits, including health care,  
10 service-connected disability, nonservice-connected pension,  
11 employment, education, housing, burial, and survival benefits. The  
12 federal department of veterans affairs provides over \$6.5 billion per  
13 year in benefits to veterans in Washington. The average veteran  
14 receiving service-connected disability compensation benefits receives  
15 over \$1,700 per month.

16 The legislature further finds that nationwide, approximately 32  
17 percent of veterans receive federal disability compensation.  
18 Washington currently has approximately 530,000 resident veterans, but  
19 only 158,000 veterans are receiving federal benefits. Currently,  
20 veterans in 15 Washington counties receive benefits at or above the  
21 national average, 21 counties are within 10 percent of the national

1 average, and three counties are more than 10 percent below the  
2 national average.

3 Therefore, the legislature intends to expand the veterans service  
4 officer program started in 2019 to increase the number of veterans  
5 applying for and receiving federal benefits. The program's first  
6 veterans service officer assisting veterans in the identification of  
7 benefits and filing of claims increased the number of veterans  
8 applying for benefits from 13 in the first year to 323 in the third  
9 year, and from no annual disability payments to \$2,696,524 in federal  
10 benefits each year. The Washington state department of veterans  
11 affairs' September 30, 2024, veterans service officer program report  
12 estimates the cost to expand the program is \$160,000 per year for  
13 each additional county. The legislature intends to expand the program  
14 by one to two veterans service officers per biennium beginning with  
15 the counties with the lowest percentage of benefits received, until  
16 all counties are at or above the national average.

17 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 43.60A  
18 RCW to read as follows:

19 The department must support veterans by providing information  
20 regarding available veterans services. Subject to the availability of  
21 amounts appropriated for the specific purposes provided in this  
22 section, the department must:

23 (1) Contact veterans within 90 days of receipt of a discharge  
24 notice from the department of defense and provide information about  
25 veterans benefits and services;

26 (2) Provide county-specific information on the department website  
27 identifying services and resources available to veterans using  
28 information provided to the department by county veterans assistance  
29 programs and local branches of nationally recognized veterans service  
30 organizations; and

31 (3) Beginning December 1, 2026, and every two years thereafter,  
32 report to the governor and the appropriate standing committees of the  
33 legislature regarding veterans services. The report must include, at  
34 a minimum:

35 (a) The number of veterans residing in each county;

36 (b) The number and type of veterans services available in each  
37 county;

38 (c) The number of veterans served in the reporting period by the  
39 department, veterans service officer program, and counties

1 contracting with the department for veterans services, including the  
2 number of veterans served who reside in an adjacent county;

3 (d) The number of claims filed in the reporting period by  
4 veterans service organizations contracting with the department;

5 (e) The percentage of veterans served in the reporting period who  
6 received service-related disability and nonservice-connected  
7 veterans' pensions; and

8 (f) Identification of:

9 (i) Each county where the percentage of the veteran population  
10 receiving service-related disability and nonservice-connected  
11 veterans' pensions is below the national average; and

12 (ii) Each county that does not provide access to a veterans  
13 service officer through the veterans' assistance program defined in  
14 RCW 73.08.005, through a contract with the department, through the  
15 veterans service officer program described in RCW 43.60A.230, or  
16 directly through the department.

17 **Sec. 3.** RCW 43.60A.230 and 2019 c 223 s 1 are each amended to  
18 read as follows:

19 (1) There is created in the department the veterans service  
20 officer program. The purpose of the veterans service officer program  
21 is to provide funding to underserved eligible counties to establish  
22 and maintain a veterans service officer within the county. "Eligible  
23 counties," for the purposes of this section, means counties (~~with a~~  
24 ~~population of one hundred thousand or less~~) where the percentage of  
25 the veteran population receiving federal disability or pension  
26 compensation is below the national average.

27 (2) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated (~~in the~~  
28 ~~veterans service officer fund under RCW 43.60A.235~~) for the specific  
29 purposes provided in this section, the department must:

30 (a) Establish a process to educate local governments, veterans,  
31 and those still serving in the national guard or armed forces reserve  
32 of the veterans service officer program;

33 (b) Develop partnerships with local governments to assist in  
34 establishing and maintaining local veterans service officers in  
35 eligible counties who elect to have a veterans service officer; and

36 (c) Provide funding to support eligible counties in establishing  
37 and maintaining local accredited veterans service officers. (~~Funding~~  
38 ~~is provided on a first-come, first-served basis. Funding may only be~~  
39 ~~provided to support the equivalent of one full-time veterans service~~

1 ~~officer per eligible county.)~~ The department shall prioritize  
2 additional funding to eligible counties with the lowest percentage of  
3 the veteran population receiving federal disability or pension  
4 compensation, and then to eligible counties without a veterans  
5 service officer.

6 (3) The application process for the veterans service officer  
7 program must be prescribed as to manner and form by the department.

8 (4) The department may adopt rules necessary to implement this  
9 section. The department shall include a requirement that any county  
10 that participates in the veterans service officer program must allow  
11 any veteran residing in an adjacent county access to the county's  
12 veterans service officer.

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