

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5441

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Government Operations & Elections, February 12, 2007

Title: An act relating to improving veterans' access to services.

Brief Description: Improving veterans' access to services.

Sponsors: Senators Hobbs, Fairley, Holmquist, Rasmussen, Kohl-Welles, Franklin, Fraser, Tom, Zarelli, Parlette, Clements, Rockefeller, Shin, McAuliffe, Benton and Kilmer.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Elections: 2/12/07 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Fairley, Chair; Oemig, Vice Chair; Roach, Ranking Minority Member; Benton, Kline and Swecker.

Staff: Amy Van Horn (786-7784)

Background: The Department of Veterans Affairs has reported that one in nine Washington citizens is a veteran, and that some of those veterans do not receive any services from the Department. The Department has also found that many veterans do not receive state and federal benefits for which they qualify, either because they don't know about them or don't know how to apply for them. Federal programs offer disability benefits and pension payments, as well as health care, home loans, and education assistance.

Summary of Bill: The Department of Veterans Affairs must study efficient ways to increase access to veterans, and to increase veterans' access to state and federal assistance programs. The Department must report its findings and recommendations to the Legislature by December 1, 2007.

The report must address:

- how to maintain an accurate accounting of veterans in the state;
- how to obtain referrals from other agencies that currently provide services to veterans;
- how to make veterans aware of all the state and federal programs available to them;
- potential costs and savings to the state if the recommendations are undertaken; and
- what legislation would be needed, if any, to undertake the recommendations.

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

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill aims to identify situations where the state is paying to care for veterans when there are actually federal resources in place to provide those services. It will save the state a lot of money. In addition, correctly identifying how many veterans are in the state will help us request federal help, and help us provide services to veterans. Veterans often come home from serving their country and have no idea what help is available to them. Once we know who they are, we can help veterans get what they need, and help them increase their earning power as well.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Hobbs, prime sponsor; Skip Dreps, Paralyzed Veterans of America; Mike Partridge, Veteran Legislative Committee; Lloyd A. Burroughs, National Association for Black Veterans, Inc.; Karen Lee, Commissioner, Washington Employment Security Department; Alfie Alvarado, Deputy Director, Washington Department of Veterans Affairs.