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HOUSE BILL 1863

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State of Washington                      62nd Legislature                      2011 Regular Session

By Representatives Seaquist, Sells, Maxwell, Finn, and Ormsby

Read first time 02/07/11. Referred to Committee on Higher Education.

1            AN ACT Relating to assistance for student veterans at institutions  
2 of higher education; adding a new section to chapter 28B.35 RCW; and  
3 making appropriations.

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

5            NEW SECTION.    **Sec. 1.** A new section is added to chapter 28B.35 RCW  
6 to read as follows:

7            (1) Currently, more than two million veterans are eligible to  
8 enroll full time in colleges across the country, however, many are not  
9 fully accessing their veterans' educational benefits. Due to time  
10 restrictions on these benefits, it is essential that colleges  
11 coordinate services that allow veterans to enroll and complete their  
12 degrees in a timely manner. A coalition has been formed in Washington  
13 state to bring together community colleges and a public university in  
14 regional capacity to meet the needs of student veterans and to benefit  
15 veterans in ways including a more seamless transition from community  
16 colleges to four-year institutions of higher education.

17            (2) Western Washington University shall coordinate a program that  
18 leverages leadership of returning veterans. Olympic College, Everett

1 Community College, Skagit Valley College, Whatcom Community College,  
2 Bellingham Technical College, Northwest Indian College, and Western  
3 Washington University are the participating institutions.

4 (3) As a central resource, Western Washington University is  
5 responsible for, but not limited to:

6 (a) Providing leadership opportunities for interested veterans that  
7 draw upon veterans' military experiences;

8 (b) Identifying resources and pooling efforts among veterans to  
9 address barriers to education such as child care and transportation,  
10 and to create connections among student veterans;

11 (c) Reviewing and revising policies to improve the transfer  
12 experience, with particular emphasis on reducing barriers unique to  
13 student veterans, including difficulties encountered by student  
14 veterans with mixed federal veterans' administration benefits and state  
15 financial aid awards;

16 (d) Developing partnerships between the institutions and outside  
17 agencies to bridge veteran support and services;

18 (e) Providing training for certifying officers on changes to  
19 benefits processing and relevant laws;

20 (f) Providing training to faculty and staff on student veteran-  
21 related issues; and

22 (g) Providing training for faculty, staff, and student peer  
23 volunteers.

24 (4) Each participating institution under subsection (2) of this  
25 section should endeavor to:

26 (a) Create a full-time dedicated veterans' coordinator or  
27 certifying official;

28 (b) Create a dedicated veterans' office presence, both in-person  
29 and online, to provide a place for veterans to meet, study, and connect  
30 with other students who share in their transitional challenges  
31 returning to civilian life and to access referral information;

32 (c) Collaborate with student representatives from organizations and  
33 clubs to promote programs that will engage and support veterans and  
34 help in the transition from military to civilian life;

35 (d) Provide direct assistance in areas such as academic advising,  
36 career planning, tutorial services, financial literacy, and services  
37 tailored to meet veteran's individual needs such as counseling and  
38 disability services.

1 (5) Western Washington University shall allocate funds to the  
2 participating institutions based on the number of veterans receiving  
3 services at the institution.

4 (6) Western Washington University, with input from the  
5 participating institutions, shall report by November 1st of even-  
6 numbered years to appropriate committees of the legislature on outcomes  
7 of the program in this section, including:

8 (a) The change in numbers of student veterans transferring from  
9 two-year to four-year institutions;

10 (b) The change in numbers of student veterans graduating, and of  
11 those graduating in a timely manner;

12 (c) Any increased opportunities for student veterans to be engaged  
13 in leadership activities and their preparedness to use leadership  
14 skills in a nonmilitary setting;

15 (d) Whether student veterans exhibit a stronger connectedness with  
16 institutions and other veterans through mentoring, leadership  
17 opportunities, and resource sharing;

18 (e) Any improved access to services and resources through  
19 partnerships, collaborative efforts, and direct assistance;

20 (f) Enhanced knowledge for service providers, faculty, and staff on  
21 each campus; and

22 (g) The improvements in basic infrastructure needs at individual  
23 campuses.

24 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** (1) The sum of eight hundred seventy-two  
25 thousand seven hundred dollars, or as much thereof as may be necessary,  
26 is appropriated for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2012, from the  
27 general fund to Western Washington University for the purposes of this  
28 act.

29 (2) The sum of one million ninety-seven thousand five hundred  
30 dollars, or as much thereof as may be necessary, is appropriated for  
31 the fiscal year ending June 30, 2013, from the general fund to Western  
32 Washington University for the purposes of this act.

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