



Legislation Text

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A MOTION requesting the King County veterans' program advisory board and the executive to evaluate veterans' relief program needs for the brave men and women returning home from military service, making recommendations for veterans' relief program needs to the council and identifying opportunities to link veterans' relief services with the broader human service needs of King County.

WHEREAS, the laws of the state of Washington, chapter 73.08 RCW, "Veterans' Relief," assigns significant responsibility for veterans' aid to county government, and

WHEREAS, approximately one hundred eighty thousand nine hundred veterans live in King County, which is twenty-seven percent of the state's veterans, and

WHEREAS, many veterans have needs for essential human services as a result of their military experience, with eighty-five thousand six hundred thirteen people receiving health care and ninety-four thousand one hundred sixty-three veterans and survivors receiving disability compensation or pension payments from the Veterans Administration ("VA") in Washington last year, and

WHEREAS, VA facilities in Washington state had twelve thousand fifty-eight inpatient admissions and supported another one million twenty thousand nine hundred seventy-two outpatient visits at community facilities last year, and

WHEREAS, the VA's Northwest Health Network, which includes Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington, reported the highest percentage of homeless veterans hospitalized for mental health reasons, which was nearly fifty percent, compared with the VA's national average of twenty-eight percent, and the region

ranked fifth in the nation for the percentage of homeless veterans with acute psychiatric disorders, which was twenty-eight percent, and fourth in the nation for admissions of homeless veterans with substance abuse problems, and

WHEREAS, the Puget Sound region has a growing homeless population, estimated to be close to six thousand on any given night, and the VA estimates that more than forty percent of all homeless adults in the region are veterans, and

WHEREAS, the VA reports that, since the start of the war in Iraq in March 2003, more than twenty-six thousand men and women in the military have applied to receive their benefits, and about one-third of those claims have not yet been processed, and

WHEREAS, the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder ("PTSD") estimates that thirty percent of men and women who have served in the military during conflict will suffer from mental illness including memory and cognitive disorders, inability to function in social or family life, severe depression and occupational instability, and

WHEREAS, substance abuse is an extremely common form of self-medication in those suffering from PTSD, according to National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder studies, and

WHEREAS, the annual operating budget for King County's veterans' program is approximately two million one hundred thousand dollars, funding seven full-time employees and providing contract counseling services and direct aid for eligible veterans, and

WHEREAS, King County's veterans services include:

1. Financial aid and emergency assistance for rent, food, utilities, medical needs and burial;
2. Employment services, such as job placement, career counseling, job training; transportation and employment support;
3. Mental health counseling, including crisis and PTSD counseling and intervention services; and
4. Case-management services that provide assistance for those needing transitional or permanent

housing, claims or help getting into treatment programs, and

WHEREAS, King County also contracts for veteran services to provide long-term housing, short-term housing, treatment for trauma, homeless prevention, veterans incarcerated prevention and other programs, and

WHEREAS, as a regional service provider King County has lead responsibility, provides substantial funding and manages essential human service programs for substance abuse prevention, transitional housing and mental health treatment, and

WHEREAS, King County has established a veterans' program advisory board, which advises the council and executive on programs and services that assist and support veterans and their families who reside in King County, and

WHEREAS, the veterans' program advisory board is comprised of seventeen members plus alternates selected by federally recognized veterans' organizations in King County, such as Vietnam Veterans of America, Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion and Disabled American Veterans, with a mix of relevant experience and perspectives on veterans' issues and needs, and

WHEREAS, a substantial and growing number of brave men and women are now returning home to King County after completing their military service and may need additional local support, and

WHEREAS, funding for veterans relief services is one component of a complete human services system, and

WHEREAS, the council recognizes that there are many critical funding and service needs within the broader human services system in King County and that a comprehensive approach will best serve those in need;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT MOVED by the Council of King County:

A. The veterans' program advisory board is requested to evaluate veterans relief services currently provided, and identify critical gaps or shortfalls which currently exist or which might occur as a result of returning veterans recently discharged from military service. The veterans' program advisory board is asked to

work collaboratively with the executive, regional officials, health care professionals, housing agencies, city governments, human service professionals and other experts in conducting this evaluation. The report of the veterans' program advisory board is requested to be filed with the clerk of the council, for distribution to the chair of the council, on or before December 1, 2005. Specific recommendations in this report are requested for the following essential veterans' relief programs:

1. Baseline funding levels, staffing support and sustenance of the successful jail diversion program, which targets early release and treatment for incarcerated veterans;
 2. Identification of resources which may be needed for mental health counseling to treat veterans and their families, for afflictions such as post-traumatic stress disorder. Recommendations should address aid needed in the form of additional county staff to help process referrals, and contract staff funding to provide direct service;
 3. Identification of resources which may be needed for additional housing assistance, either as short-term transitional housing, financial aid for rental support or long-term housing for case management;
 4. Evaluate adequacy of direct cash payments, which are financial aid, for veterans used for medical needs, housing, food, transportation and other living expenses in emergencies. The recommendation should identify current the annual cap for individual support, and assess whether the current annual limits are appropriate or inadequate for emergency needs;
 5. Evaluate whether the county should develop an outreach program to help get local veterans qualified for appropriate federal assistance programs more quickly. Anecdotal information indicates that many local veterans needlessly suffer because they have not applied for and do not take advantage of federally funded medical, housing, educational and other support opportunities; and
 6. Other findings, recommendations or suggestions deemed appropriate by the veterans' program advisory board.
- B. As a part of the report to review and make recommendations on veterans' relief services, the

executive is requested to identify methods for linking potential funding sources and mechanisms for veterans' relief services with potential funding sources and mechanisms for the broader human service needs in King County. The report should include, but not be limited to opportunities for minimizing overlap of services in an effort to maximize efficiencies and leveraging potential funding sources both internal and external to King County.

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