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Washington State Legislature Joint Committee on Veterans' and Military Affairs

Executive Committee:
Representative Barbara Bailey
Senator Steve Conway
Representative Tina Orwall
Senator Pam Roach

Meeting Minutes

November 27, 2012, Olympia, WA

Members present: Bailey, Becker, Carrell, Conway, Hudgins, Orwall, Rolfes, Shin, and Swecker

Members absent: Finn, Hobbs, Hope, Klippert, McCune, Roach, and Sullivan

The meeting was called to order at 2:11 pm by Senator Conway, co-chair.

Consideration and Recommendation of Proposed Legislation

Rep. Zeiger briefed the committee regarding a bill he plans to introduce that would provide property tax relief to wounded warriors. This bill would extend the concept of the veterans' property tax break to wounded warriors who have been certified that way by their commanding officer.

Karen Epps, Senate Committee Services, briefed the committee on a bill that Senator Roach plans to introduce that would allow for a veteran designation on a driver's license or identification card for veterans with a discharge status of "honorable" or "general under honorable conditions". The bill would require a fee that cannot exceed \$7.50 per designation.

Karen Epps briefed the committee about a bill that Senator Shin plans to introduce that would revise the definition of "resident student" to include a student who is an honorably discharged military veteran residing in this state at the time of his or her separation from military service or a student who is a spouse or a dependent of an honorably discharged veteran residing in Washington at the time of his or her separation from service.

Senator Carrell briefed the committee regarding a bill he plans to introduce regarding the veteran's preference in the hiring process for state employment. This bill would eliminate the distinction between those veterans who have served less than 19 years from those who served more than 19 years.

Senator-Elect Bailey briefed the committee regarding a bill she plans introduce that would allow for equal opportunity in our schools for military recruiters on career days and other types of opportunities.

Senator Conway recommended that as these drafts come forward over the next month, the committee try to find a period of time to meet again and make recommendations separately.

Legislative Update from the Veterans Legislative Coalition

Jim Sims, Chair, Veterans Legislative Coalition (VLC), briefed the committee on the VLC's priorities for the legislative session. The VLC's priorities for the legislative session are for anything that will support jobs and training for veterans, continuation of social services to the benefit of veterans and their families, and proper funding for the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA). There are three bills that the VLC supported last year that they continue to support: Senator-Elect Bailey's bill providing access to campuses for recruiters; Rep. Hansen's bill for early registration opportunities for Guard and Reserve personnel at colleges; and the designation of I-5 as the Purple Heart Trail. There will be a bill to eliminate the sunset provision of the WDVA's Veterans Innovations Program (VIP). The VIP provides temporary financial support for Guard and Reserve personnel who are facing tough times. The Veterans Raffle, which supports the VIP, is underway and tickets are on sale.

Arlen Harris, Washington Lottery Commission, briefed the committee regarding the Veterans Raffle. This is the second year the Lottery Commission has done the raffle. The raffle kicked off on Veteran's Day and will be drawn on January 1. Currently about 20% of the tickets have been sold. After the prize payout, there should be about \$300,000 for the VIP. If tickets do not sell out this year, the Commission will want to have a conversation with the VLC, the WDVA, and the Legislature to look at other ways the Lottery can support the VIP.

A update on the projects to evaluate military training and experience for licensing requirements in medical professions and expedite professional licenses, certificates, and registrations of military spouses

Karen Jensen, Assistant Secretary, Health Systems Quality Assurance, Department of Health, briefed the committee on the Department's program to provide expedited licenses for relocated spouses and temporary practice permits for veterans. Ms. Jensen discussed three bills from the past few legislative sessions, ESSB 5969 (2011), SB 6290 (2011), and ESSB 5307 (2011). The Department offers temporary practice permits for military spouses, and has had 40 spouses apply for temporary practice permits. A military spouse may request a moratorium on his or her license while he or she is out of state. The Department is taking a hard look at military training and equivalency and creating a comprehensive crosswalk between military training and civilian training. Ms. Jensen's PowerPoint is available on the committee's webpage.

Senator Conway asked about a formal report from the Department of Health regarding the responsiveness of the various licensing boards to consider military training towards licensure and where there are successes and outcomes. The Department of Health is also working on a report on suicide assessment and treatment for active service and military personnel and veterans that is due in December 2013.

Ralph Osgood, Assistant Director, Department of Licensing, briefed the committee on the steps the Department has taken to streamline its permitting process for military spouses. The Department has established a close working relationship with other states in order to process applications more quickly. The Department is also evaluating military training and experience that can be applied toward licensure.

Veteran transition model with Joint Base Lewis McChord (JBLM)

There was a panel discussion on active duty transition services. The panel consisted of:

- Alexis Oliver, Executive Policy Advisor, Governor's Executive Policy Office;
- Robin Baker, Transition Services Manager, JBLM; and
- Mary Forbes, Assistant Director, WDVA.

The panel discussed the Veterans Opportunity to Work to Hire Heroes Act of 2011(VOW Act) which expands education and training opportunities, works to improve the Transition Assistance Program and creates tax credits for companies that hire veterans. There is mandatory transition counseling and planning no later than 12 months prior to separation from the military and there is now an individual transition plan for the service member. The Governor's Office established a workgroup to help enable seamless transition and enhanced opportunities for service members and to create a sustainable platform that supports a holistic approach to employment and business opportunities in Washington state that can be replicated across the nation as a benchmark process.

Mentoring veterans are who starting businesses

Tami Michaels, Creative Director, Sound Kitchen & Bath, briefed the committee on the issue of mentoring and hiring veterans. Ms. Michaels is a radio and news broadcaster and she tries to draw attention to the unemployment issues facing veterans leaving the military. As an interior designer, Ms. Michaels wanted to recommend a veteran who provides construction services, but ran into problems with the Department of Labor and Industries . As the business owner, Ms. Michaels would be expected to mentor the veteran and oversee his work and he would be considered an employee. Ms. Michaels does not want to hire him permanently because she does not have consistent work for him, but rather she wants to mentor him and refer work to him when it is available. Ms. Michaels expressed a desire to refer work to other small veteran-owned businesses. Additionally, Ms. Michaels would like to see legislation that would allow for mentoring of veterans.

Programs for hiring and training military veterans

Chris Winters and Todd Mitchell briefed the committee on the Helmets to Hardhats program. The program provides briefings to transitioning service members on construction trade apprenticeships. The program also provides counseling for those service members. They held an Apprenticeship and College Fair at JBLM in September 2012 attended by over 1200 people. Helmets to Hardhats is also working on establishing an apprenticeship program with the contractors working on base, so that those contractors can hire veterans to do an apprenticeship. Mr. Winters discussed the hiring practices of Martinac Ship Building, who has a strong history of hiring veterans.

Marjorie James, Executive Director of Hire America's Heroes, briefed the committee on the work that Hire America's Heroes is doing to encourage employers to hire veterans. Hire America's Heroes was formed in 2007 with representatives from Starbucks, Microsoft, Weyerhaeuser, Washington Mutual Bank, and Volt Services Group, all of whom wanted to do a better job of bringing veterans into their organizations. Hire America's Heroes works with corporations to help them bring in transitioning service members and connect with family members of military service members and veterans. Hire America's Heroes holds four major events every year, including career days and a symposium. Hire America's Heroes also has mentoring programs and job shadowing programs for transitioning service members. They also assist transitioning service

members with using social media, such as LinkedIn, to find job prospects and preparing for job interviews.

Alexis Oliver, Executive Policy Advisor, Governor's Executive Policy Office and Heidi Audette, Communications Director, WDVA, briefed the committee on other state initiatives for hiring veterans. Ms. Audette and Ms. Oliver discussed what Colorado, Missouri, Illinois, Idaho, Vermont, and Connecticut are doing to establish veteran hiring programs. Some of these states have outreach programs, others include a tax credit for hiring a veteran, some have on-the-job training programs, and some have a combination. Ms. Oliver also discussed some of the things Washington has done to be considered the most veteran-friendly state. The Employment Security Department (ESD) has developed a comprehensive website to connect employers and veterans. ESD has established the Commissioner's Approved Training Program that allows veterans to attend fulltime training while they are receiving unemployment benefits. The Governor issued a directive to state agencies to encourage them to hire veterans. The Governor's Office is also working on holding hiring events at JBLM. A PowerPoint presentation is available on the committee's webpage with more information.

John Lee, Director, WDVA, briefed the committee on the need to develop a transition program similar to what is being established at JBLM at the other military bases in the state. More than 50% of the soldiers leaving JBLM did not participate in a transition program because it wasn't mandatory. The VOW Act gave the opportunity to make this mandatory. WDVA plans to ask the Legislature for additional resources to assist in developing transition programs for the other branches of the military. If a transitioning service member leaves the military with a job, the state saves money on unemployment benefits. Mr. Lee discussed the benefits of a state tax credit for employers who hire veterans. Mr. Lee also discussed capital budget needs: demolishing buildings at Retsil Veterans Home and building the Walla Walla Veterans Home.

The meeting adjourned at 4:47 pm.