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**SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5358**

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**State of Washington**

**68th Legislature**

**2023 Regular Session**

**By** Senate State Government & Elections (originally sponsored by Senators Gildon, Nobles, Conway, Holy, Lovelett, Nguyen, Randall, Torres, Wagoner, Wellman, C. Wilson, and L. Wilson)

1 AN ACT Relating to expanding veterans' services and programs;  
2 amending RCW 43.60A.101; adding new sections to chapter 43.60A RCW;  
3 creating a new section; and providing expiration dates.

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

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds that it is vital for  
6 veterans in their return to our communities to have adequate  
7 community supports. Local programs that connect veterans with their  
8 federal benefits and with other veterans for peer support are crucial  
9 components of that structure. It is the intent of the legislature  
10 through this act to enhance state funding of these programs to ensure  
11 they are robust and widely available throughout the state.

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

14 (1) By September 30, 2024, the department must submit a report to  
15 the legislature on the veterans service officer program authorized in  
16 RCW 43.60A.230 to determine the effectiveness of the program in  
17 meeting the needs of veterans in the state. The report must include  
18 the number of veterans receiving services from the program, the  
19 location of such services, and an analysis of areas of the state that  
20 are lacking these services. The report must also include

1 recommendations for how to phase in an expansion of these services to  
2 these areas.

3 (2) This section expires December 31, 2024.

4 **Sec. 3.** RCW 43.60A.101 and 2017 c 192 s 5 are each amended to  
5 read as follows:

6 (1) By ((December 31, 2018)) September 30, 2024, the department  
7 ((of veterans affairs)) must submit a report to the legislature on  
8 the veteran peer-to-peer training and support program authorized in  
9 RCW 43.60A.100 to determine the effectiveness of the program in  
10 meeting the needs of veterans in the state. The report must include  
11 the number of veterans receiving peer-to-peer support and the  
12 location of such support services; the number of veterans trained  
13 through the program to provide peer-to-peer support; and the types of  
14 training and support services provided by the program. The report  
15 must also include an analysis of ((peer-to-peer training and support  
16 programs developed by other states, as well as in the private and  
17 nonprofit sectors, in order to evaluate best practices for  
18 implementing and managing the veteran peer-to-peer training and  
19 support program authorized in RCW 43.60A.100)) areas of the state  
20 that do not have these support services and are in need of these  
21 services, including recommendations for how to phase in an expansion  
22 of these services to these areas.

23 (2) This section expires December 31, 2024.

24 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** A new section is added to chapter 43.60A  
25 RCW to read as follows:

26 It is the intent of the legislature to increase state  
27 appropriations for veterans service officer and peer mentoring  
28 programs with this act. As a result, and subject to the availability  
29 of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the department  
30 shall provide grants to counties of the state in order to develop or  
31 expand veterans service officer programs, peer-to-peer support  
32 programs, and other services and programs to assist veterans in areas  
33 where these programs and services are needed. In distributing these  
34 grants, the department must prioritize counties with smaller  
35 populations and counties that are below the national average in the

1 percentage of veterans receiving federal disability or pension  
2 compensation.

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