Washington State
House of Representatives
Office of Program Research

BILL ANALYSIS

Technology, Economic Development, & Veterans Committee

SB 5420

Brief Description: Ensuring access to state benefits and opportunities for veterans, uniformed service members, and military spouses.

Sponsors: Senators Lovick, Wagoner, Chapman, Dozier and Nobles.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Expands eligibility for certain pension, retirement, and veterans' benefits based on military service.
- Adds federal commissioned corps to definition of uniformed services.
- Expands type of military service that qualifies military spouses and dependents for pension and retirement benefits, license moratoria, and veterans' employment.

Hearing Date: 2/18/26

Staff: Emily Poole (786-7106).

Background:

Pension and Retirement Benefits.
Washington's state-sponsored retirement services provide credit for interruptive military service, and some plans provide military service credit for non-interruptive military service. The additional service credit cannot exceed five years. Eligibility requirements for credit vary across retirement services for firefighters, police, city employees, and public employees.

Other State Benefits.

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

Certain state benefits are available for certain types of military service, and in some cases, available to military spouses or dependents.

Department of Licensing Moratorium.
A license remains in effect for any person licensed by the Director of Licensing or certain boards and commissions who enters service in the armed forces, the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps (Public Health Corps), or the Merchant Marines. The license of a spouse or registered domestic partner of a member of the armed forces, including the Public Health Corps, must be placed in inactive status if requested by the licensee, if certain conditions are met.

Veterans' Scoring Criteria in Examinations.
Veteran applicants for public offices, positions, or employment with the state, political subdivisions, municipal corporations, and private companies or agencies contracting with the state receive a scoring criteria status of 5 to 10 percent.

Veterans' Employment.
Veterans receive certain benefits related to public and private employment, as follows:

- Public employment: Soldiers, sailors, guardians, marines, and other members of the uniformed services who are veterans of any war or of any military campaign with a ribbon and qualifying discharge, as well as their widows or widowers, receive preferential appointment and employment for every public department and all public works of the state and each county.
- Employment restoration: A person is entitled to be restored to an employment position after the person's period of active military duty or service as if on furlough or leave of absence.
- Permissive employment: A permissive private employment preference is available for honorably discharged soldiers, sailors, and marines who are veterans of any war or any campaign for which a ribbon has been awarded, as well as their widows or widowers.
- Spouse employment: Spouses of veterans with a qualifying discharge and who have a service-connected permanent and total disability also receive preferential appointment and employment. In private employment, spouses of honorably discharged veterans who have a service-connected permanent and total disability may also be preferred for employment in every public department and all public works of the state and each county.

Definition.
The "uniformed services" for purposes of veterans employment are defined as: the armed forces, Army National Guard, and Air National Guard of any state, territory, commonwealth, possession, or district when engaged in active duty for training, inactive duty training, full-time National Guard duty, or state active duty; the Public Health Corps; the Coast Guard; and any other category designated by the President in time of war or national emergency.

Washington Service Members' Civil Relief Act.
The Washington Service Member's Civil Relief Act (WSMCRA) applies to military members and their dependents whose financial and legal obligations may be impacted by active military

duty. The WSMCRA's main provisions provide rights with respect to default judgments and stays in civil proceedings. The WSMCRA also contains provisions restricting contract fines and penalties, restructuring interest rates on certain business loans, and tolling statutes of limitations during periods of military service.

For purposes of the WSMCRA, a "service member" is an active member of the United States armed forces, a member of a military reserve component, or a member of the National Guard.

Definitions.
For purposes of the militia and military affairs, a "member" is a soldier or airman of the organized militia. The organized militia includes both the state and national guard.

"Qualifying discharge" means discharge with an honorable, general under honorable, other than honorable, or any characterization of service, with certain limitations.

Federal Services.
The Public Health Corps is the uniformed service branch of the Public Health Service and one of eight uniformed services of the United States. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps (NOAA Corps) is another of the uniformed services. The Public Health Corps and the NOAA Corps are the two branches of uniformed services that have only commissioned officers and no enlisted or warrant officer ranks.

The United States armed forces include the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Space Force, and Coast Guard. Established in 2019 the Space Force is the newest branch of the armed forces, and its members are called guardians.

Summary of Bill:

Pension and Retirement Benefits.
The uniformed services, defined to include the Public Health Corps and the NOAA Corps, are added to specified benefits for firefighters, police, and city employees.

Provisions regarding eligibility for Public Employees' Retirement System Plan 1 military service credits are modified to include both members of the armed forces and the uniformed services, which is defined to include the Public Health Corps and the NOAA Corps.

Other State Benefits.
Department of Licensing Moratorium.
The Department of Licensing moratorium is extended to a licensee who is a service member in, or a spouse or registered domestic partner of a service member in, the NOAA Corps.

Veterans' Scoring Criteria in Examinations.
Members of the uniformed services may receive a veteran scoring criteria status. "Member of the uniformed services" is defined to include a person who has served in the Public Health Corps

or NOAA Corps who has received a qualifying discharge or is actively serving honorably.

Veterans' Employment.
The NOAA Corps is added to the definition of "uniformed services." Additional changes to the provisions of veterans' employment are made to the following categories:

- Public employment: The requirement that a person is a veteran of any war or campaign for which a ribbon was awarded is removed as a qualification for preferential appointment and employment. The preference for veteran spouses is extended to spouses of active duty service members.
- Employment restoration: Members of the uniformed services are entitled to employment restoration.
- Permissive employment: Guardians and uniformed service members are eligible for employment preferences. The requirement that a person must be a veteran of any war or any campaign for which a ribbon has been awarded is removed as a required qualification.
- Spouse employment: Spouses of active duty service members are eligible for preferential public employment. Military spouses and spouses of active duty service members are eligible for a permissive preference in private employment.

Definitions.
For the militia and military affairs, the definition of "member" is expanded to include a guardian. For purposes of the WSMCRA, the definition of "service member" is expanded to include a member of the Public Health Corps or the NOAA Corps.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.