

HCS HB 1787 -- GUARD AT HOME PROGRAM

SPONSOR: Richard (Jackson)

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "do pass by consent" by the Committee on Job Creation and Economic Development by a vote of 18 to 0.

This substitute establishes the Guard at Home Program to assist the spouse of an active-duty national guardsman or reservist by addressing his or her immediate needs and employment in order to keep the family from falling into poverty while the primary income earner is on active duty and to help returning troops find work in situations where an individual needs to rebuild business clientele or where an individual's job was eliminated while on deployment.

The Department of Economic Development is required to hire a contractor to administer the program. The Division of Job Development and Training will ensure that the contractor meets certain qualifications specified in the substitute. The division will develop the criteria of the contract based on the following:

- (1) Eligible program participants will be families where:
 - (a) The primary income earner was called to active duty in defense of the United States for more than four months;
 - (b) The primary income is no longer available;
 - (c) The family is experiencing a significant hardship due to financial burdens; and
 - (d) The family has no outside resources available to assist with these hardships; and
- (2) Services may be provided to families in order to alleviate an immediate crisis and to provide economic stability while the primary income is not available due to the active military commitment. The substitute specifies some of the services which may be provided.

The department will report to the President Pro Tem of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives on the operation and progress of the program by January 1, 2007.

The substitute becomes effective on July 1, 2006, and the division must make every effort to ensure that participating families are being served by August 1, 2006.

The substitute contains an emergency clause.

FISCAL NOTE: No impact on state funds in FY 2007, FY 2008, and FY 2009.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that the bill will assist the spouses of active-duty military by helping them find jobs, thereby keeping them out of poverty. When a member of the National Guard is mobilized, the family usually suffers a dramatic loss of income. This is especially true for enlisted soldiers. This program will also help improve the morale of soldiers because they won't worry about their families being able to make ends meet. Improved morale and less stress are very important. Soldiers who know their families are taken care of will do a better job.

Testifying for the bill were Representatives Jackson and Smith (14); Military Officers Association of America, State Council; American Legion, Department of Missouri; Missouri Association of Veterans Organizations; Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, Missouri Department; Vietnam Veterans of America, Missouri State Council; Kevin Rainwater, Lakes Country Resource Centers; Marine Corps League, Department of Missouri; and Missouri National Guard Association.

OPPONENTS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill say that this is one more tool the Veterans Ombudsman can use to assist veterans and their families. However, a system already exists to help spouses of military members, and additional bureaucracy doesn't need to be created for this purpose.

Others testifying on the bill were Missouri Veterans Commission; Division of Workforce Development, Department of Economic Development; and St. Louis Community College.

Alice Hurley, Legislative Analyst