WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

**FISCAL NOTE**

2023 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

Senate Bill 710

By Senators Blair (Mr. President) and Woelfel

(By Request of The Executive)

[Introduced February 20, 2023; referred
to the Committee on Military; and then to the Committee on Finance]

A BILL to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding thereto a new article, designated §9A-7-1, §9A-7-2, §9A-7-3, §9A-7-4, §9A-7-5, §9A-7-6, §9A-7-7, and §9A-7-8, all relating to establishing a pilot program to provide grants to veterans who relocate to West Virginia to reside and work; creating the program; defining terms; creating the Welcome Home Grant Program Fund; specifying distribution of grant awards; requiring management and implementation by the Department of Veteran’s Affairs; requiring annual reporting; and specifying a date for the termination of the pilot program unless extended by the Legislature.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 7. Welcome Home grant program.

§9A-7-1. Legislative findings.

The Legislature finds that it is imperative to attract hardworking people to West Virginia to live and work. The Legislature recognizes that West Virginians have a proud history of military service and is home to a significant number of United States veterans from all branches of military service, men and women who have served their country honorably and are the very example of work ethic, dedication, and citizenship needed in this State. Thus, the Legislature seeks to incentivize United States veterans throughout the country to relocate themselves and their families to West Virginia to live and work, through the Welcome Home Grant Program established herein.

§9A-7-2. Creation of the Welcome Home Grant Program.

There is hereby established a Welcome Home Grant Program, to be administered by the Department of Veteran’s Affairs, as a pilot program with the purpose of providing incentives in the form of cash grants to assist in relocation costs for veterans who relocate themselves and their families to West Virginia.

§9A-7-3. Definitions.

As used in this article:

(a) "Veteran" means an individual who:

(1) Served on active duty and was discharged or released from active duty with an honorable discharge or because of a service-connected disability;

(2) Served as a member of a reserve component under an order to active duty, served on active duty during a period of war or in a campaign or expedition for which a campaign badge or ribbon is authorized and was discharged or released from duty with an honorable discharge; or

(3) Served as a member of a National Guard or Reserve component and completed his or her military obligation and received an honorable discharge from said National Guard or Reserve component or was discharged from said National Guard or Reserve component because of a service-connected disability.

(b) "Relocation" means a veteran who is domiciled outside of West Virginia that becomes a full-time resident of West Virginia on or after January 1, 2024.

(c) "Department" means the Department of Veteran’s Affairs.

§9A-7-4. Creation of Welcome Home Grant Program Fund.

There is hereby created in the State Treasury a special revenue fund account known as the Welcome Home Grant Program Fund. The fund shall be administered by the department solely for the purposes of this article. Any moneys remaining in the fund at the close of a fiscal year shall be carried forward for use in the next fiscal year.

§9A-7-5. Grant awards.

(a) Any veteran who relocates to West Virginia with the intent to remain a full-time resident in this state for a minimum of three years may be eligible for a grant of $5,000 to cover relocation expenses under the Welcome Home Grant Program, subject to the availability of funding.

(b) Grants shall be awarded in the discretion of the secretary of the department. Upon application approval by the Department and proof of residency, a veteran shall receive a lump sum of $5,000 to help cover relocation and similar costs, subject to available funding as appropriated by the Legislature.

(c) If a grant recipient fails to remain a full-time resident of West Virginia for the full three years, then the recipient shall repay the pro rata portion of the award amount for the time the recipient is not a full-time resident of the state.

§9A-7-6. Department duties; rule-making authority.

(a) The Department shall create and adopt procedures to implement the grant program established in this article including, but not limited to, an application process, evidence necessary for proof of residence, and evidence necessary for proof of employment.

(b) The Department, in partnership with the Department of Tourism based on its experience with the marketing of similar programs, shall promote awareness of the program through marketing and coordination with other state economic development programs.

(c) The Department shall adopt measurable goals, performance measures, and an audit strategy to assess the utilization and performance of the program.

§9A-7-7. Annual report required.

The Department shall file a report with the Legislature’s Joint Committee on Government and Finance, the Legislative Oversight Commission on Workforce Investment for Economic Development, and the Governor at the end of each fiscal year for the life of the program, commencing June 30, 2025. This report shall include the following:

(1) The number of veterans receiving grants under the program;

(2) The locations within this state of recipients of program grants and their domiciles prior to relocation; and

(3) The types of work or professions and locations where grant recipients and their families are employed after relocation.

§9A-7-8. Termination of pilot program.

Unless extended by act of the Legislature, this pilot program shall terminate on June 30, 2027.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to create the Welcome Home Grant Program, a pilot program to incentivize veterans to relocate to West Virginia to reside and to work.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.