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**Armed Services, Veterans Affairs, and Homeland Security Committee
As proponents for OH HB 468
By The Ohio National Guard Association (ONGA)
and The Ohio National Guard Enlisted Association (ONGEA)
February 28, 2018**

Chairman Johnson, Vice Chairman Kick, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Armed Services, Veterans Affairs, and Homeland Security Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony and seek your support of Ohio House Bill 468 co-sponsored by Representatives Perales and Boyd. Special thanks to the sponsors of this bill for their continued support of veterans which includes most members of the Ohio National Guard and their families through sponsorship of HB 468.

My name is Tonia McCurdy. I am a veteran and still currently serve in the Ohio National Guard. I serve as the Legislative Task Force co-chairperson for the Ohio National Guard Association. I am writing today on behalf of the Ohio National Guard Association (ONGA) and the Ohio National Guard Enlisted Association (ONGEA). Both organizations advocate for the thousands of current and former members of the Ohio National Guard and their families. I do not speak for The Adjutant General's Department as I understand they are neutral on this issue.

So, why are the Ohio National Guard and Ohio National Guard Enlisted Associations (ONGA and ONGEA) concerned about this issue? Our members who are veterans and have suffered from a service connected injury or illness are vulnerable to the hardships that can be created when having to take additional time off of work to travel distances to receive consultations and treatment.

As you are aware, the current policy authorizing sick leave for state employees was written without any special regard for the growing number of veterans requiring medical evaluation and treatment through the VA. While we do not have exact figures as to how many Ohio National Guardsmen and women are impacted by this scenario, we make an assumption that after 17 years of operating in areas of hostility and war that these numbers are high and continue to increase. We know that the workload of the Veterans' Administration has increased compounding the time that it may take for a veteran to receive evaluation and treatment for service connected disabilities.

Included in this process are travel times to and from medical treatment facilities identified by primary care physicians at VA facilities. Medical testing and care is normally required by a specialist or specialists who may be at a different facility. Additionally, the veteran may have little control over when the appointments will be scheduled.

House Bill 468 will provide veterans with the ability to go through the time consuming process to receive evaluation and treatment needed to identify and treat service connected disabilities without the service member exhausting their earned sick leave and vacation time. Depending on the individual circumstances, the duration and frequency of appointments may decrease once a service member receives their disability rating which will provide them the eligibility they require for treatment and other benefits.

As the Air Force and Army National Guard continue to serve as expeditionary and operational forces being called upon for federal duties on a routine basis, the number of service members who are state employees will be positively impacted by this additional authorization for time away from work to document and prove their service connected disabilities and to receive treatment for those documented illnesses and injuries.

Although this law will only affect state employees and not the private workforce, competition for great employees will depend increasingly on the entire compensation and benefits packet. And judging from our many employers who partner with the Ohio National Guard, it is likely that many will consider this benefit because "it is the right thing to do."

It takes a special commitment to take the oath to support and defend ones country and protect their state. Members of the Ohio National Guard and other state national guards who are called upon by their governors are loyal to their fellow citizens in need in addition to the call of their country that other veterans have taken. Please reward that loyalty with the passage of this bill. By doing so, the great state of Ohio will not only be taking care of the men and women who have cared for them, but they will be rewarded by having some of the finest employees in government.

Mr. Chairman, and committee members, I thank you for your time and the opportunity to express our support for Ohio's National Guard and all veterans working for Ohio state government who stand always ready and always there.