

Chairman Johnson, Vice Chair Kick, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Armed Services, Veteran Affairs, Homeland Security Committee, I would like to first thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak as a proponent of H.B. 468. I would also like to thank Representatives Perales and Boyd for inviting me here today.

My name is Will Thompson, and I am the current Commander for the Department of Ohio Military Order of the Purple Heart. I am a combat wounded, medically retired veteran of the Army and Ohio Army National Guard with 16 years of service. After my release from Walter Reed Army Medical Center and release from active duty I was rated my total and permanent disability from the VA and was also granted disability from the Social Security Administration from the injuries I sustained while in the military. To this day, I continue my physical and mental therapy, but it took me seven years before I knew that I could re-enter the workforce. I felt I was ready to continue my service and become a contributing member of society again. I would like to state that I am not alone in that thought. I know many veterans who feel this way and who want to re-enter the workforce and continue their service to their community. However, with that, there is significant anxiety felt by myself and other veterans when we first start that process of re-entering the workplace. That is when I felt the need to draft the proposal that led to Representative Perales and Representative Boyd sponsoring this bill.

The anxiety felt is that of how do we properly manage our physical and mental health while maintaining a career? I and the veterans I regularly interact with have ongoing appointments with the VA for our service-connected disabilities. Because of those appointments, there is anxiety of how we will balance work, with our needs, and unfortunately, sometimes the decision is made not to look for work. We served our country and communities, and during that service, we endured injuries and maladies that we may have not otherwise. All we are asking now is that we be able to continue our care without prejudice or barriers while continuing to work.

Many veterans are too discouraged to look for employment because of the stigma in the community that veterans cannot be productive employees due to having regular V.A. appointments and taking time away from the employer. That is simply not true. The reality is that with a proper balance of continued care the veteran can be a tremendously productive employee.

Thank you, Chairman Johnson, Vice Chair Kick, Ranking Member Craig and members of the committee. I am open to any concerns or questions that you may have.