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Committees
Agriculture and Rural Development
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Chairman Johnson, Vice Chair Kick, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to give sponsor testimony on House Bill 558. This bill may appear familiar as it was previously introduced as HB 295 from which I picked up and reintroduced.

Current Ohio law exempts owners of service dogs from paying registration fees if they can show proof that their dog is a service dog. We do this for good reason, as service dogs are vital for improving the quality of life of their owners. It would not be right to charge individuals with disabilities a registration fee for a dog that they have out of necessity rather than choice.

It especially would not be right to charge the fee to veterans who got their disability in service of their country. Unfortunately, the code is currently unclear as to whether veterans with service dogs for service related disabilities such as post-traumatic stress disorder, or traumatic brain injury are exempt.

This was brought by a county auditor in my district who noticed inconsistencies between counties that are granting the exemption to veterans, depending on their interpretation of the ORC. I think we can all agree that veterans should not have to pay to register a dog that helps them live with a disability they suffered while serving our country. There have been numerous recent studies showing the mental health and well-being benefits of service dogs for veterans who are suffering.

This bill ensures that does not happen by explicitly exempting veterans with diagnoses of post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, or other service-related disabilities from paying registration fees for their service dogs. Like other individuals with service dogs, they would still need to show proof that the dog is indeed a trained service dog in order to receive the exemption.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present this bill today and I will answer questions.

Riordan McClain