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House Armed Services, Veterans Affairs, and Homeland Security Committee

House Bill 636 Testimony
Representative Dan Ramos
May 23rd, 2018

Chairman Johnson, Vice Chairman Kick, Ranking Member Craig, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 636, legislation to aid veterans displaced by natural disaster.

Following the hurricanes in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands last year, as many as [179,000](#) net airline passengers left Puerto Rico for the United States, and it is estimated that nearly [20,000](#) Puerto Ricans will resettle in Ohio because of the hurricane. Many of these new Ohioans are veterans who rely on critical VA services for their livelihood.

This issue was brought to my attention because of the mass migration of citizens to Lorain after the hurricanes in Puerto Rico last year. Though it does not always receive national media attention, movement from disaster happens frequently on a smaller scale.

Under current law, in order to qualify for financial assistance from a county veterans service commission, a person must be a bona fide resident of the county for three months. This requirement prevents veterans who have left their previous home due to a disaster from seeking assistance when they might need it most.

This legislation would waive the three month eligibility requirement if a veteran has relocated from another county after a disaster declared by our Governor, or another state or territory after a disaster declaration by the President.

Although we cannot stop the rain, we should be able to stop our veterans from undue suffering and hardship. As tornado season has already begun, and as hurricane season nears, this will continue to be an issue for many veterans resettling in Ohio as a result of natural disasters outside their control. If a veteran moves to a new community after losing their home or possessions because of a hurricane, tornado or earthquake, we should help them right away when they need it most.

The bill would allow a veteran seeking services to file an affidavit stating they have moved to a community from another area affected by a disaster declared by the President or our Governor. Upon receiving the waiver, the three-month residency requirement for benefits would be waived, and the veteran could continue receiving benefits immediately.

We can never thank our veterans enough. These servicemen and women should not be forced to wait for help after being forced out of their homes.

Thank you for your consideration, I welcome any questions on this bill.