

**TESTIMONY TO HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE OF MICHAEL MOSES  
FOR OHIO STATE ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE  
COMMISSIONERS & OHIO STATE ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY VETERANS  
SERVICE OFFICERS**

Chairman Smith, Vice Chairman Ryan, Ranking Member Cera & Members of the Finance Committee

My name is Michael Moses, and I represent the Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Commissioners and the Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Officers.

I will be brief in my remarks as this is the 9<sup>th</sup> hearing on H. B. 49, and previous testimony presented by Nichole Coleman of the Service Officers Association and others have spelled out our opposition to those proposed sections of HB 49 which affect the structure of the county veterans service commissions which deliver services and help administer benefits under R.C. Sec. 5901.06 and 5901.07. I think it is necessary to point out that the Department of Veterans Services conducted a study in 2013 on this very subject, and made no conclusions or recommendations to alter the current service model of county veterans service commissions.

So, I think it's important to ask what changed in the last 4 years?

We have worked with the Department on modifications to training to improve veterans services throughout the State as well as other issues to assist veterans and their families, and the Associations do not minimize the accomplishments of the Department of Veterans Services. However, the proposed revisions to R.C. Sec. 5901.06 and 5901.07 are not in the best interests of Ohio's veterans.

Local veterans working for local government helping and assisting those within a community gain and maintain the benefits they have earned through their service so they can improve their quality of life and be a productive part of our local communities. That is what veterans who act as County veterans service officers are trained for, and that's what they do. Expanding the definition of a veteran and allowing non-veterans to serve as service officers or other staff and increasing the list of qualifications for executive directors does not serve the interests of the veterans of Ohio.

The issue is not whether spouses, surviving spouses, children or parents of veterans could do the job. The issue is whether veterans bring a special quality to the table in serving veterans. For one thing, the maze of the federal VA in making successful claims for medical benefits and ongoing service-connected disability benefits is extremely difficult to navigate for someone without the experience and training of a county veterans service officer. Furthermore, no one understands the veteran's

sacrifice like another veteran, and can bring the passion and the zeal to obtain benefits for veterans who've made the sacrifice of service to our country.

It ought to be noted that the combination of the hiring functions of R.C. Sec. 5901.06 and 5901.07 into one provision effectively eliminates civil service protection for county veterans service officers and other staff, thereby, disrupting continuity of services to veterans if a new administration comes in and decides to clean house. A career expertise and institutional knowledge of veterans issues and Title 38 is developed over time, and to permit firing at will of county veterans service officers without cause invites easy manipulation of employment at the veterans service commission which will make the veterans victims of political patronage and defeat the worthy objectives of Chapter 5901.

Furthermore, practically speaking, the proposal of the Department makes little sense, because, as you may be aware, the county veterans service commissions bring in millions of federal dollars to each of Ohio's 88 counties. So, to change the current structure of the county veterans service commissions will significantly impair delivery of services to Ohio's veterans and, also, perhaps, the economic stimulus that this federal money brings to each community.

The proponents of HB 49 as it relates to the amendment of R.C. Sec. 5901.06 and 5901.07 bear the burden of justifying such a significant change to the delivery of services to veterans. The Department has not met that burden, and its own study from 2013 revealed nothing major in the structure of the county veterans service commissions, nor did it suggest significant changes in the statute. Because the system isn't broke, it doesn't need to be fixed by this proposal which appears not to have been given adequate consideration before it was inserted in HB 49.

I appreciate your serious consideration of our position, and invite any questions you may have.

Thank you.