



Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Officers

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20 March 2017

President Nichole Coleman
Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Officers
H.B. 49/FY 2018-19 Budget Testimony
Ohio House of Representatives Finance Subcommittee on Transportation

Chairman McColley, Ranking Member Reece, Representative Green, Representative Patton and Representative Rogers: I am Nichole Coleman, the president of the Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Officers and a seven-year Air Force veteran. I am a County Veterans Service Officer in Hancock County.

Based on the questions I was asked following last week's testimony I am concerned that our primary contentions with H.B. 49 were lost in the budget-related issues. It is the desire of both associations to have the language of Ohio Revised Code 5901.06 and 5901.07 kept as it is currently written. It is our opinion that the changes proposed to Revised Code 5901.06 and 5901.07 do nothing but dismantle and disrupt a smoothly functioning service delivery model to aid and assist Ohio's veterans and their families.

Those proposed changes include:

1. If adopted, H.B. 49 would place more stringent requirements on executive directors of county veterans service officers than that which is imposed on the Director of the Ohio Department of Veterans Services. Keep in mind that the County Veterans Service Commissions and Offices are funded fully by property taxes within their county ... no state funding. Amazingly, this untested new administrative model will demand far greater qualifications for county executive directors than for the political appointee who is the director for ODVS.
2. Another change would include opening the duty title of County Veterans Service Officer to non-veterans. The leaders of ODVS expressed to me that the intention of this specific change is to provide their office the ability to provide accreditation recommendation to the Department of Veterans Affairs for non-veterans to file claims on behalf of veterans. This accreditation process can happen without this change to the law.
3. The final change in this section of H.B. 49 which we oppose is changing the definition of a veteran. Defining veteran status should not be done on a state-by-state basis. The primary definition should be that which is accepted by the VA ... under Title 10 orders and proven with a DD 214 or DD 215! This is not an issue of judging one person's service over another's but rather keeping in accord with federal law.

20 March 2017

Ref: H.B. 49 Testimony from OSACVSO/OSAVSC

I am not going to restate all the points from last week's testimony but there are a few points worth repeating. Just over three years ago the Department of Veterans Services paid approximately \$100,000 to conduct a study of the veterans services programs in the state. The findings of that study showed that Ohio's delivery of services to veterans is among some of the best in the country. Why then would a cabinet level office, with just 18 months in office, determine in such a short amount of time that changes are needed to the law currently in place that puts these fine-tuned systems in motion? What are the reasons for these changes, and what will be the unintended consequences?

Ohio's County Veteran Service Officers helped bring almost 2.2 billion dollars into Ohio in 2015 in just compensation and pension benefits. The hard work, education and dedication they have demonstrated in assisting Ohio's veterans and their dependents is apparent in dollars brought to each county.

We were not provided with any input prior to the submission of these proposed changes, and, thus, cannot begin to know or understand the intent for which they are offered. Pursuant to Revised Code Section 149.43 we requested documents, records or information from DVS on February 16th and still have not received the items requested.

Without any information to justify the proposed amendments, we urge you and the entire House of Representatives to adopt the amendment that will be submitted by Representative Sprague deleting lines 89,681 through 89,759 in H.B. 49.

We remain interested in ideas about improvement of services to the deserving veterans and their families in Ohio and our counties, and will continue to strive for excellence and will always look for the best ways to do so, but feel such changes can be made without unnecessary changes to the law, and certainly with the input of those providing the services on Ohio's frontlines, the Veteran Service Officers and Veteran Service Commissioners.

It will be our privilege to work with you on these issues in H.B. 49, or on any issues concerning veterans in Ohio. We appreciate the time and interest each of you have shown in ensuring our veterans are properly served, just as they have served our Nation.

WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

PLEASE COMPLETE THE WITNESS INFORMATION FORM BEFORE TESTIFYING

DATE: 3/13/17

NAME: NICHOLE R. COLEMAN

ORGANIZATION: OHIO STATE ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS
(IF APPLICABLE)

POSITION/TITLE: PRESIDENT

ADDRESS: 1100 E MAIN CROSS ST SUITE 123

CITY: FINDLAY STATE: OH ZIP: 45840

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ARE YOU REPRESENTING: YOURSELF _____ ORGANIZATION XXX

DO YOU WISH TO TESTIFY ON
LEGISLATION (BILL NUMBER): 49
SPECIFIC ISSUE: _____
SUBJECT MATTER: _____

DO YOU FAVOR _____ OR OPPOSE XX THE ENACTMENT OF LEGISLATION REGARDING THIS ISSUE?

PLEASE GIVE A BRIEF STATEMENT OF THE GROUNDS ON WHICH YOU FAVOR OR OPPOSE SUCH ENACTMENT:

REPRESENTATIVE SPRAGUE'S OFFICE WILL SUBMIT AMENDMENTS THAT WE ARE IN FAVOR OF.

WILL YOU HAVE A WRITTEN STATEMENT, VISUAL AIDS, OR OTHER MATERIAL TO DISTRIBUTE?
Yes X No _____

(IF YES, PLEASE PROVIDE COPIES TO THE CHAIRMAN OR SECRETARY)

HOW MUCH TIME WILL YOUR TESTIMONY REQUIRE? 10-15 MINUTES