

Testimony of LT Karl D. Feldmann, USPHS
In Support of HB 351

Chair Schaffer, Vice Chair Scherer, Ranking Member Rogers, and members of the committee. I thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of HB 351.

My name is Karl D. Feldmann and I have been a resident of the State of Ohio since 1990. I am an honorably discharged veteran of the United States Army where I served as an enlisted man in the Infantry with deployments to Panama, Honduras, Puerto Rico, and South Korea. Currently, I am a Lieutenant in the Commissioned Corps of the United States Public Health Service (USPHS). My category is Environmental Health Officer. I am on active duty and currently stationed in Cincinnati, Ohio serving as an Industrial Hygienist with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), which is part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

As a commissioned officer in the USPHS I have two duties; the first is to the agency I am assigned; in this case, NIOSH. These duties are focused on protecting America's workforce from chemical, physical, and biological hazards. I am also a member of a NIOSH first-responder team trained and ready to respond to anthrax-related emergencies within 72 hours.

My second duty is to the nation itself. Every USPHS officer is assigned a deployment role in order to respond to public health emergencies, as the USPHS has a national response role under Emergency Support Function (ESF) #8 – *Public Health and Medical Services of the National Response Plan*. In fact, my USPHS deployment team (Applied Public Health Team 4) will be on-call in the month of December and I expect to be deployed to Puerto Rico for (approximately) 30 days in support of the ongoing response and recovery activities there. Previously, I was deployed by my parent agency (CDC) for 30 days to Sierra Leone in July 2015 where I provided infection prevention and control training and support to USAID and UKAID employees as well as Sierra Leonean health care workers in the district of Kambia. That deployment was in response to the Ebola viral disease epidemic in West Africa.

From its beginnings with Marine Hospitals in Cleveland and Cincinnati, and the Stream Pollution Research Station in Cincinnati; to its modern role in public health research and delivery of healthcare to the vulnerable and underserved; the officers of the Commissioned Corps of the USPHS have long been a part of Ohio. In the past sixteen years, officers stationed in Ohio have played a vital role in public health emergency response, including responding to the September 11 attacks and anthrax attacks; to natural disaster responses like Hurricane Katrina in 2005; the Haitian Earthquake and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010; Superstorm Sandy in 2012; Unaccompanied Minors in 2014; prolonged and repeated deployments to West Africa and throughout the United States in 2014 and 2015 as part of the Ebola viral disease response; ongoing Zika virus responses in the US, the Caribbean, and Central and South America; and

currently, ongoing responses to hurricane disasters in Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico and The U.S. Virgin Islands.

I am here today to speak in support of HB 351, which would amend the Ohio Revised Code to include the military pay of members of the commissioned corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and U.S. Public Health Service in the state's "active duty" exemption from municipal income tax. The intention of House Bill 351 is simply to change the Ohio Revised Code to use the term "uniformed services" instead of "armed forces" as it applies to exempting active duty earnings from municipal income tax.

The Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Corps are two of the seven uniformed services of the United States, along with the more familiar Armed Forces. The USPHS Commissioned Corps and NOAA Corps are the only uniformed services that consist only of commissioned officers. USPHS officers wear the same uniforms as the United States Navy, or the United States Coast Guard (when assigned to the Coast Guard), with USPHS insignia, and hold ranks equivalent to officers of the Navy. USPHS officers typically receive direct commissions and attend a two-week Basic Officer Training Course. NOAA officers complete a 14-week Officer Candidate School with Coast Guard officer candidates. USPHS and NOAA officers are afforded the same rights and privileges as commissioned officers in the Armed Forces, with equivalent pay and benefits. Active duty service in the USPHS and NOAA Corps is considered to be military service under federal law, and we are accorded veterans status when we complete our service. In seeking your support for HB 351, we are asking that Ohio recognize our service and grant us parity under law with the Armed Forces.

HB 351 would have very little impact on income taxes collected by Ohio municipalities. Of the 57 active duty Public Health Service officers who live and work in Ohio, only about 28 live in municipalities that collect income tax. Accounting for each of these officer's monthly base pay and local tax rates, we estimate that HB 351 would cost Ohio municipalities only \$49,200 annually in lost tax revenues. Furthermore, the effects of HB 351 would be spread across approximately twelve municipalities.

In short, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, passing HB 351 would not only correct the Ohio Revised Code and treat all Uniformed Services members equally in terms of municipal taxes, it can be the next step in bringing parity to all service members in the great state of Ohio.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony and I hope you will favorably consider HB 351. Thank you.

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