

133rd General Assembly

House Bill 18 – Proponent Testimony

Fr. Matthew Lee

Thank you Chair Schaffer, Vice Chair Lipps, and Ranking Member Rogers. I am Father Matthew Lee, a Catholic Priest and pastor of four churches in Champaign County, located in the 85th District of the Ohio House of Representatives. I am a Veteran of the United States Air Force, having spent 12 years, 3 months and 5 days on Active Duty (apparently the VA was counting), including a three-year tour in Germany during which I worked for NSA.

During my stint with No Such Agency I worked with extremely sensitive information processes, all of which were subject to five security agreements, all of which began with the same five Unclassified words: “I will never tell anyone....” For this reason and in the interest of National Security I am not at liberty to discuss what I may or may not have been doing at the time I suffered a service-connected, line-of-duty, career-ending injury.

I can tell you that during transit from one location to another my vehicle was broadsided by an intoxicated Local National at a high rate of speed. My vehicle was crushed around me. It took 30 minutes for emergency responders to cut my vehicle apart and extract me from the vehicle. My spinal cord was damaged as well as other nerves, muscles, and bones. As a result of this injury I was no longer able to carry the required mobility equipment. This resulted in a Formal Medical Evaluation Board. The Medical Evaluation Board awarded me a 20% disability rating, a Disability Severance Payment in lieu of retirement, and an Honorable Discharge.

My Disability Severance Payment was just over \$52,600 (\$52,639, 27%). The Federal Government took over \$14,000 in taxes (\$14,213), and the State of Ohio took nearly \$1,000 (\$971.59). This left me unemployed and injured, with no military retirement benefits.

The Federal Government has changed the law retroactively to eliminate taxes on Disability Severance Payments. I am asking the State of Ohio to consider doing the same. Honorably discharged Veterans injured in the line of duty should not be injured again by the State of Ohio taxing our Disability Severance Payments. This change would make Ohio a more welcoming place to live for injured Veterans, if they know they will not lose nearly a third of their Disability Severance Payment.

I appreciate Representatives Vitale and Crawley bringing this bill forward in a bipartisan way to help injured Veterans like myself.

Thank you for your time, and if there are any questions, I'd be happy to answer them now.