



Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Officers

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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. Standing with me is Ted Bruner, the president of the Ohio State Association of Veterans Service Commissioners and a five-year Army veteran. I am a County Veterans Service Officer in Hancock County and Ted is a Veterans Service Commissioner in Darke County.

Representative Rogers, Jon Warmeling sends his regards and wishes he could be here today.

We appreciate efforts to improve delivery of services to the nearly 850,000 veterans who call Ohio home. However, 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 officer, 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?

The implication underlying these proposed changes is that the county veterans service commissioners are inefficient, and that greater state-wide control by governor appointed staff in Columbus will enhance the delivery of services to veterans in Pandora, Brooklyn Heights, Mentor on the Lake, Evendale or Ripley. The millions of dollars returned to the county general fund each year come from well-run veterans service commissions who care for their county's veterans with less than the full half-mill, and STILL bring in millions more in federal dollars through VA benefits. Amazingly, this untested new

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administrative model will demand far greater qualifications for county executive directors than for the political appointee who will become the new state veterans services czar under H.B. 49.

Ohio's County Veteran Service Officers helped bring almost 2.2 billion dollars into Ohio in 2015. 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, and to your counties. If any of you personally believe your county can do better, our Associations would gladly work with you and your County Veteran Service Officers directly.

I hope I got your home counties correct; these are the figures for 2015:

Rep. McColley, the VA spent a total of almost 7 million in Henry County;

Rep. Reece, the VA spent a total of more than 358 million in Hamilton County;

Rep. Patton, the VA spent a total of more than 3.2 Billion in Cuyahoga County;

Rep. Green, the VA spent a total of almost 421 million in Henry County; and

Rep. Rogers, the VA spent a total of almost 102 million in Lake County.

Not only are these amounts huge, they also show that there will be disparities between counties: We are not all alike; that's what makes us Americans, and Ohioans.

We were not provided with any input prior to the submission 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.

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.

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. It is our opinion that the changes proposed to Revised Code 5901.06 and 5901.07 does nothing but dismantle and disrupt a smoothly functioning service delivery model to aid and assist Ohio's veterans and their families.

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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.

As for the changes to the funding contained in various portions of HB 49 concerning veterans, but specifically removing the \$1,880,000 in direct funding of Veteran Service Organizations in Ohio and moving those funds to the purview of the Director of Veterans Services, both associations are extremely concerned. We became even more concerned after an update from ODVS on Friday, March 3rd in Columbus during an OSACVSO training session.

Director Tansill was not able to provide any guidelines or procedures on how his new grant program for Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) would work; he could not explain whether there would be any assurances the VSOs would receive any monies, only stating "...of course we're not going to de-fund them..." and he acknowledged that the 'new' rules would open the doors for any 501(c)3 to apply for a grant. When he testified February 21, 2017 before the Finance Subcommittee on Transportation, he stated that "[p]riority for grant funding will be given to programs that connect veterans to employment, training and healthcare resources." He made no mention of service work.

We certainly agree there should be accountability of these funds; however, a total re-write of the program removing potentially any and all funds available to assist Ohio veterans would have not only a drastic effect on obtaining benefits they deserve, but could potentially increase each county's expenses in that we will need to cover that extremely large work load.

It will be our privilege to work with you on these issues in H.B. 49, or on any issues concerning veterans in Ohio. I don't like this last statement, and fear I might have written it!!! How about, 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.

_____ moved to amend as follows:

1 In line 225 of the title, delete "5901.06, 5901.07,"

2 In line 493, delete "5901.06, 5901.07,"

3 Delete lines 89681 through 89759

4 In line 92587, delete "5901.06, 5901.07,"

5 The motion was _____ agreed to.

6 SYNOPSIS

7 **Veterans service commission**

8 **R.C. 5901.06 and 5901.07**

9 Removes provisions from the bill that require the
10 following:

11 - The executive director of a veterans service commission
12 to possess at least three years of experience in administration,
13 fiscal matters, law, operations, or communications;

14 - The executive director, investigators, clerks, and other
15 employees to submit proof of veterans' status within 60 days of
16 the date of initial employment;

17 - A spouse, surviving spouse, child, or parent of a veteran
18 to be hired as a service officer if a qualified veteran is not
19 available;

20 - A spouse, surviving spouse, child, or parent of a veteran
21 hired as a service officer to also provide documentation of
22 relationship to the veteran;

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23 - A veteran to file a DD215, NGB22, or official summary of
24 service as proof of veteran status.

25 Restores provisions removed by the bill that require the
26 following:

27 - A veterans service commission to employ and fix
28 compensation for the necessary clerks, stenographers, and other
29 personnel that assist service officers;

30 - Clerks, stenographers, and other personnel be a veteran
31 or a spouse, surviving spouse, child, or parent of a veteran and
32 that these employees are employed in the classified service and
33 exempt from civil service examination.