



Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Officers

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President Nichole Coleman
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H.B. 49/FY 2018-19 Budget Testimony
Senate Finance – General Government and Agency Review Subcommittee

Chairman Jordan, Vice Chair O'Brien, Senator Eklund, Senator Hoagland, Senator LaRose, Senator Peterson, Senator Skindell, Senator Uecker and Senator Yuko: 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. Our two associations represent 718 veterans' advocates who serve the more than 830,000 veterans who call Ohio home.

After a great deal of work by our members and the finance committee in the House, some changes proposed in HB 49 that would have impacted veterans were removed. 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 which the budget bill as presented to you does exactly that. The changes that were originally proposed in this bill were believed to be inappropriate because they were not budgetary in nature; thus, should have been addressed separately and would be more successful with input from all the stakeholders.

Those proposed changes included:

1. More strict requirements for executive directors of county veterans service offices than that which is imposed on the Director of the Ohio Department of Veterans Services.
2. Another change would have included opening the duty title of County Veterans Service Officer to non-veterans. The leaders of ODVS expressed to us 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 the initial version of H.B. 49 which we opposed was 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.

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

Ohio's County Veteran Service Officers helped bring almost 2.4 billion dollars into Ohio in 2016 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.

I hope I got your home counties correct; these are the total expenditures for 2016:

(The GDX report where this data is extracted from is attached for your review later if you're interested in more details.)

Senator Jordan, the VA spent more than 22 million in Delaware County;

Senator O'Brien, the VA spent more than 52 million in Trumbull County;

Senator Eklund, the VA spent almost 14 million in Geauga County;

Senator Hoagland, the VA spent almost 18 million in Jefferson County;

Senator LaRose, the VA spent more than 95 million in Summit County;

Senator Peterson, the VA spent more than 8 million in Fulton County;

Senator Skindel and Senator Yuko, the VA spent more than 238 million in Cuyahoga; and

Senator Uecker, the VA spent more than 40 million in Clermont County.

Not only are these amounts huge, they also show that there will be disparities between counties: We are not all alike.

We appreciate efforts to improve delivery of services to our veterans and are interested in participating in any stakeholder meetings to collaborate on improvement of services, outreach and advocacy for the Ohio veterans.

We urge you to not write or accept any amendments to H.B. 49 in reference to veterans and will look forward to working with you if there are proposals that you have questions 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.