

Proponent Testimony for HB 282
Ohio Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee
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Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today in support of the passage of HB 282. It has become an axiomatic reality that the downturn in Ohio's economy directly caused by the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to strain the resources of state and local government as well as Ohio's churches and charitable nonprofits to support local business and respond to human needs. Ohio's rural communities, such as the Clear Fork Valley in southern Richland County, have limited resources for charitable giving due to a lack of large companies and a smaller tax base. The Village of Bellville with a population of 1,800 and the Village of Butler with less than 900 people rely on a handful of local charities. The largest of which is the Bellville American Legion post.

Post 535 has a licensed bingo operation which donates 25% of its net profit to the Columbus based Advocates for Kids. In 2019, we donated \$8,434.81, and in 2020 we donated \$5,686.56 for a two year total of \$14,121.31. Our arrangement with Advocates for Kids is that we can designate 50% of our donation back to our local area. Those donations in 2019 included \$1,500 to the Clear Fork Youth League to help finance youth baseball, soccer, and football. A \$500 donation was also made to the Clear Fork High School Athletic Boosters and another \$2,200 was used to send four boys and three girls to the American Legion's Buckeye Boys State and Buckeye Girls State program. In 2020, we will be donating \$3,000 in end of year donations to our local boys and girl scouts, cub scouts, The Salvation Army's and local Bellville Police Dept.'s Christmas Appeal, local schools, and the Bellville Neighborhood Outreach Center which provides a food pantry and clothing distribution center for families in need. The remainder of our 2019 donation to Advocates for Kids resulted in their use of our \$3,985 in support of programs for Ohio's children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Our partnership with Advocates for Kids limits these donations to programs for children. These funds cannot be used to support the needs of adults. That is why the revenue from licensed raffle machines are important. We have partnered with the American Legion Dept. of Ohio Charities to direct money from the raffle machines to the Butler Senior Citizens Center which provides daily congregate feeding of seniors as well as home delivered meals to shut ins throughout the Butler/Bellville area. We made a \$1,000 contribution to a hospital to pay a portion of the medical bill not covered by insurance on behalf of a family whose son was badly injured in a car accident. We have also used the raffle machine income to make a \$6,000 pledge to the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Building and Museum in Mansfield toward the development of a new aviation museum documenting the history of civilian and military flight in Richland County.

These charitable contributions must go to 501 (c) (3) nonprofits or schools. There are times when we have been confronted with individual's problems that cannot be met by donating to a nonprofit on their behalf. That is why we founded our own Veterans in Distress Fund which receives its funding from an annual auction at the Post. During this last year, we paid two months' back rent to prevent a veteran and his family from being evicted from their apartment. We paid the cost to repair the car of a single female veteran to enable her to commute to work and provided a gift card for her to buy gasoline for the car. We later provided \$600 to a disabled senior veteran and his wife to purchase food for a month and buy gas for their car to travel to doctors appointments and necessary local travel.

In conclusion, let me say that I served seven terms as a Richland County Commissioner and saw the impact of the 2001 recession and the devastation of the 2008 Great Recession which resulted in a loss of 25% of our County's General Fund revenue for 2009. Such a dramatic drop in public funding nearly eliminates the ability of local government to provide public services beyond the minimum necessary to maintain public safety and provide for citizens in need. In those times, just as now in the midst of this pandemic, communities will need to unite all local resources, both public and private, to meet the needs of those most vulnerable to our economic downturn. The contribution of private nonprofits greatly reduces the strain on the state government to provide funds at the local level. Yet, as important as the amount of this money is, it is also important to realize that local need is better identified by local organizations which can provide assistance at a lower administrative cost due to the use of many unpaid volunteers. For these reasons, I ask this committee to support passage of HB 282 which will provide the necessary resources for veterans organizations such as American Legion Post 535 to better serve their local community.

Thank you for the honor to testify before your committee today. I will be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have.