

**Testimony of Jacob Smith**

**Executive Director of Lorain County Veteran Service Commission**

**Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committee- Ohio House of Representatives**

**Wednesday, May 18th, 2022**

**Room 018 9:30**

My name is Jacob Smith, and I am here today to speak in support of House Bill 581. The purpose of which is to allow Veteran Service Commissions around the state to use their county-issued credit card to assist Veterans in their county with temporary and necessary assistance.

The current law we are asking to be changed can be found in (ORC 301.27) governing county credit card use. Currently the law only allows county agencies to use their credit cards for travel, vehicle maintenance, food, phone, and internet expenses. The one exception within 301.27 refers to Ohio Public Children's Services, which authorizes the use of an agency credit card for child assistance. I am here today to seek a similar exception for the Veteran Service Commissions for two main reasons.

First, in an emergency, a credit card allows the county VSCs to react quickly to meet the needs of our clients. For example, a Veterans house burns down, the Veterans Commission could utilize a credit card to arrange for emergency services while providing other needed items immediately.

Second, suppose the Veteran requests items such as clothing to start a new job. In that case, a credit card allows the VSC to make immediate purchases. The ability of our agency to obtain items such as workboots or uniforms allows a client to re-enter the workforce quickly.

I would like give a real world example about how we could have used our county credit card to assist a veteran in our county that happen in just the last month.

The veteran, applied for residency at a local apartment and was accepted. However he was told that his unit would not be available until March 21. The veteran works full-time, second shift for local Lorain county business. The veteran recently lost his wife to a long-term illness, and his home foreclosed soon after that. A family member of his offered him a place to stay until the apartment was available for occupancy.

Unfortunately, this was a violation of the family member's lease agreement. Thus the property manager ordered The veteran to leave the apartment. After working an eight-hour shift, the veteran, now homeless was forced to pack his belongings into his car at approximately 12:00 midnight. Overnight temperatures were around 30 degrees. He spent the night in his car in his employer's parking lot with the engine running periodically to stay warm.

Later that same day, around noon, we called the veteran about getting some paperwork done for his new unit that would be available the following week. When he answered the phone, It was clear that we had woken him up. That is when he told the events that had taken place the previous night. The veteran stated that he was due to get paid at the end of the week and would not be able to get a hotel to stay in until then. He planned to live in his employer's parking lot until then. We found this to be unacceptable.

Once again, we were faced with the inability to temporarily house a homeless veteran and provide him with a place to shower and a warm place to sleep immediately. Our only option was to seek out a non-profit and request emergency assistance from them to house the veteran in a hotel. Emergency Veteran Support was very gracious and secured a room for the veteran at a local hotel.

This proposed legislation, as introduced, is strictly an administrative function that accomplishes these goals. For this reason, we are supportive of this change in Ohio law 301.27. This legislation, as introduced, has no impact on title 5901 of the ORC, which governs Ohio's Veterans Service Commissions around the state.

This genesis bill was born out of a conversation between Lorain County Commissioner David Moore and myself almost a year ago. Though he very much wanted to be here today to offer in person testimony his responsibilities as a county commissioner required his presence in Lorain County today. However he asked me to convey to the committee his full support of this bill.

I would also like to add that this bill has received the support of my county's auditor Craig Snodgrass. Who stated in an email to me recently ..."As Lorain County Auditor, I fully support your efforts and offer my assistance in providing any testimony or supportive documentation if desired."

It is for these reasons that here today, speaking in support of Senate Bill 287. I look forward to any questions you may have.