



Representative Andrea White
41st House District
HB 569 – Sponsor Testimony

Good Morning Chair Lanese, Vice Chair Young, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the House Higher Education and Career Readiness Committee. I am honored to stand here today on behalf of our veterans to tell you about House Bill 569 and ask for your support. This legislation, as Rep. Holmes eloquently explained, authorizes state higher education institutions to provide scholarship opportunities to students who are caregivers of veterans who have a 100 percent service-connected disability.

The love between a veteran and their caregiver, and that caregiver and their veteran is powerful. Today, we want to empower both of these individuals through the Ohio Hidden Heroes Scholarship Program by giving caregivers the opportunity to pursue their higher education, whether that's a credential or a degree, without having to pay for it. This bill is aimed at individuals who are providing care for veterans who are completely disabled. With the online options available today and so much more access to higher education, now is the time to do this for our veterans and their families.

Since 2001, over 20,000 U.S. service members were injured in Operating Enduring Freedom and Operation Freedom Sentinel with a majority of those injuries occurring before 2014. And they have come home to be completely reliant on individuals caring for them – most often parents, spouses, children and siblings. This legislation will show support for both our veterans and the families who care for them. Both of these parties are heroes and both of these individuals every day continue to sacrifice for our country and our freedoms.

The beauty of this program is that the idea came from Dayton-area residents involved with Blue Star Families and the Elizabeth Dole Foundation's Hidden Heroes cities program. The state of Ohio and several of our cities are part of this national network including Dayton, Middletown, Toledo, and Trotwood. Their idea inspired community, education and government leaders to take action to support our military caregivers through the Hidden Heroes Scholarship Program.

A **military caregiver** is a family member, friend, or acquaintance who provides a broad range of care and assistance for, or manages the care of, a current or former military service member with a disabling physical or mental injury or illness. These caregivers are the unsung heroes behind the heroes of our nation. They provide an invaluable service to our country by serving those who have sacrificed and endured wounds in the protection of our freedoms. We want to recognize these individuals by encouraging Ohio colleges and universities to provide financial support as they seek to complete their education.

Ohio would be the first state to pass legislation providing educational options for caregivers of veterans who are totally disabled. Ohio truly cares about our veterans and their families and this initiative moves us even closer to our goal of making Ohio the most military and veteran friendly state in the country.

Ohio Hidden Heroes Scholarships will provide workforce development and education opportunities for caregivers – many of whom (about 40%) already have some previous college experience. This allows them to finish a degree or certificate while caring for their veteran without worrying about how to pay for it.

The program is completely voluntary for Ohio colleges and universities. If they opt to participate, they can choose to cover one scholarship or provide for all who apply. The Ohio Department of Higher Education will develop a website to explain the scholarship and list the colleges/universities participating and share the standardized application.

This legislation has been vetted with the following stakeholders – all of whom expressed support for the program.

- o Ohio Department of Higher Education
- o Ohio Department of Veterans Services
- o Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities
- o Inter-University Council (Ohio public colleges and universities)
- o Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Ohio (Ohio private colleges and universities)
- o Ohio Association of Community Colleges
- o and SOCHE (Strategic Ohio Council for Higher Education) member colleges

I'd like to thank Dr. Cassie Barlow, President of SOCHE, founder and chair of the Greater Miami Valley myVeteran Community, and former 88th Air Base Wing and Installation Commander of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base; Dr. Geri Maples, Dayton Region Chapter Director for Blue Star Families, and Stephanie Keinath, vice president of the Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce for bringing this idea to Representative Holmes and I. I want to send a message to our veterans and their caregivers. We see you. We support you. We want to honor you through this program so that you and your family can pursue your goals and dreams. Thank you and we are happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.