

**TESTIMONY OF IRIS FOSTER-DENIEUWE**  
**VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS DEPARTMENT OF OHIO**  
**TO THE OHIO SENATE GENERAL GOVERNMENT BUDGET COMMITTEE**

Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Craig and members of the Committee:

My Name is Iris Foster-DeNieuwe and I am the Legislative Liaison for the VFW Department of Ohio. I am also Junior Vice Commander for VFW District 11 and Post Commander of VFW Post 3764 located on Livingstone Avenue here in Columbus, Ohio. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of appropriations for the 2022-2023 VFW's Veteran Service Office.

I would like to take a moment to address our national and local philosophy our driving force more importantly the driving force for the Ohio VFW Veterans Service Office - **“EVERYTHING WE DO WE DO FOR VETERANS”**.

The VFW accredits the County Veteran Service Officers (CVSOs) of which there are 88 for each county in Ohio. In addition, the VFW has seven Veteran Service Officers (VSOs) that cover the entire state of Ohio.

In total the VSOs and CVSOs are currently representing and assisting more than 27,000 Ohio Veterans.

These organizations are responsible for bringing \$35 million dollars a month in total benefits for Veterans. These benefits are in the form of Disability Compensation, Pension, Dependents Indemnity Compensation, VR & E (Vocational Rehabilitation & Education) along with burial benefits.

The VFW VSOs meet with approximately 120 Veterans a month. Communication with Veterans can be in person, telephone, emails, or faxes – the VFW VSOs explain benefits, answer questions, prepare Veterans for hearings, make appointments, and correct VA rating decision errors. Year-to-date VFW VSO Officers have communicated with 4,310 Veterans.

COVID Protocols – Throughout the COVID Pandemic VFW Veteran Service Officers continued to work

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from home and went into the offices to pick-up mail, faxes, and and more importantly they responded to each type of communication received. On 1 July 2020 VFW Service Officers went back to work fulltime in the Dayton and Cincinnati VA Hospitals.

731 claims have been filed Year-To-Date with the help of the VFW VSOs – 2019 the start of COVID 5,184 claims were filed; and during 2020 2,501 claims were filed.

On a daily basis each of the VFW VSO Officers review VA Rating Decisions for Correctness. In 2019 at the start of COVID the officers reviewed 10,380 VA Rating decisions for correctness; in 2020 7,297 decisions were received; 2,306 reviews have been completed year-to-date.

Our Service Officers also conduct Board of VA Appeals, VA Decision Officer, and Higher-Level Review Hearings. At start of COVID in 2019 the VFW VSOs completed 84 reviews, and in 2020 73 reviews were completed; Year-to-date review for 2021 72 reviews have been completed by VFW VSOs. Both the VA and Board of VA Appeals are being ramped up to Video Appeal Hearings due to COVID.

VFW Veteran Service Officers also represent new Ohio Veterans. In 2019 at the start of COVID VFW VSOs serviced 5,794 new Veterans; in 2020 3,122 new Veterans were serviced; Year-to-date 940 Veterans have been serviced.

These statistics do not represent at all the human side of what is done for Veterans or the actual work that is completed in the working day of a VFW Veteran Service Officer. The human approach, the

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the dignity that is provided to the Veteran or the Veteran's family is immeasurable. These statistics do not address the joy, the compassion, or the fulfillment of opportunities that are provided by the VFW VSOs both monetary and intangible.

If you look at the statistics and look at the numbers that the VFW VSOs bring into the state of Ohio it can be better understood by this fact. The state of Ohio has the sixth largest Veteran population in the country. The Housing Assistance Council date from 2016 reports that there are 779,187 Veterans in Ohio of which approximately 57,600 live in poverty. Consider this if each of these Veterans received an equal portion of the \$35 million dollars of money generated by CVSO Officers each month – each of the 57,600 Veterans living in poverty would be richer by \$7,300 a year.

Lastly and in closing I want to reiterate our philosophy **"EVERYTHING WE DO WE DO FOR VETERANS"**.

This can be clearly understood with the following data:

2019 Appropriations were \$284,841

2020 Appropriations were \$251,397

**The VFW Department of Ohio is requesting appropriations of \$457,300 for FY2022-2023 for the VFW Veteran Service Office.**

**Rationale** – Unlike other Veteran organizations in Ohio every dollar we receive from our appropriations for the VFW Veteran Service Office is spent assisting Veterans:

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**Not one dollar of our appropriation was spent for Events or Community Outreach. We spent**

**ZERO DOLLARS ON:**

Boys/Girls State – Similar Programs – **Zero Dollars**

Flags, Monuments, Cemeteries – **Zero Dollars**

Gatherings and conventions – **Zero Dollars**

Parades – **Zero Dollars**

Festivals – **Zero Dollars**

Sports Teams – **Zero Dollars**

VA Medical Facility Volunteers – **Zero Dollars**

Veterans recognition – **Zero Dollars**

Incarcerated Veterans Programs – **Zero Dollars**

Veterans Courts – **Zero Dollars**

Essay Contests – **Zero Dollars**

Scholarships – **Zero Dollars**

Other educational services – **Zero Dollars**

Emergency financial assistance – **Zero Dollars**

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Food donations – **Zero Dollars**

Funeral Services – **Zero Dollars**

Honor Guards – **Zero Dollars**

Military morale, welfare and recreation – **Zero Dollars**

Veteran Recreation – **Zero Dollars**

Newsletters – **Zero Dollars**

Outreach – **Zero Dollars**

Medical Transportation – **Zero Dollars**

**ZERO DOLLARS**

Not one dollar, one nickel, or one dime will be used for anything other than taking care of Veterans.

In closing our request for an appropriation of \$457,300 is reasonable. We want to be able to continue to fulfill our commitment to take care of those that have served, and their families. By honoring this request the VFW Veteran Service Office will have the funding to continue the VFW VSO commitment to **“EVERYTHING WE DO WE DO FOR VETERANS”**.

Thank you again Mr. Chairman for the opportunity to provide testimony. I have with me Eric Drake the VFW Department of Ohio Veteran Service Officer. Eric can provide any additional information this committee may require. Eric and I are happy to answer any questions you have at this time.

