



SENATE BILL 335
PROPONENT TESTIMONY
November 28, 2022

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Roegner, Ranking Member Martin, and members of the committee, I am Franklin County Auditor Michael Stinziano and I thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of S.B. 335. This bill will create needed residential property tax assistance for disabled veterans and their families, a population vulnerable to housing instability and homelessness.

Creating a welcoming, supportive community for veterans has been a priority of my public service career, including as a representative and city council member. Now as County Auditor, I regularly hear from residents facing cost and tax burdens who are desperate to stay in their homes. Within my office, we have, and continue to promote, existing exemptions and property relief programs, but state law change is critical to continue to meet the needs of Ohio veterans and their families. As the cost of living and property values increase, this need has become even more pronounced.

Approving this bill to change the requisite disability rating for veterans to qualify for the homestead exemption and allowing veterans to receive proof of their disability rating from the county veterans services commission would both improve accessibility to property tax exemptions and encourage veterans to connect with local services tailored to their needs. Together, these results would create a more veteran-friendly Ohio.

Expanding the exemption would benefit veterans and their families and Ohio as a whole.

As of 2019, there were 757,000 total veterans, with 152,000 receiving disability compensation in Ohio. However, only 20,000, or thirteen percent, of the veteran population receiving disability compensation is eligible for the enhanced homestead exemption as it currently stands, with the requirement for a 100 percent service-connected disability rating. By expanding the enhanced homestead exemption, so that veterans with any level of service-connected disability are eligible, the number of veterans receiving the exemption would increase seven-fold for Ohio and eight-fold for Franklin County.¹

Additionally, by expanding the veteran exemption, Ohio would distinguish itself from the majority of states' limited veteran property tax exemptions. Nationally, 27 states and the District of Columbia require that a veteran have a 100 percent service-connected disability rating to receive a property tax exemption. Lowering this disability rating threshold would strengthen Ohio's national reputation as a veteran-friendly state.

¹National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, [Veterans Eligibility Trends & Statistics](#) (2019)



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The bill would allow veterans to obtain written confirmation certifying their disability rating from either the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) or a county veterans service officer. This change promotes veteran interaction with their county veterans service commission, providing greater opportunity for the veteran and their family to be connected with other community programs and services tailored specifically for their unique needs.

Current housing cost burdens will be exacerbated by increased costs of living and property values.

One in five veterans in Ohio experiences a housing cost burden, defined as spending 30% or more of household income on housing expenses.² This burden disproportionately impacts veterans age 65 and older, a demographic that makes up the majority of veterans in Ohio and nationally. The Joint Center for Housing Studies found that the housing burden for older adults has reached an all-time high. This report specifically called out the Columbus, Ohio Metropolitan area, where nearly a quarter of homeowners aged 65 and above are housing cost burdened. This burden is despite a median income for this population of \$50,000 per year.³

Options for Further Expansion of the Homestead Exemption

I whole-heartedly endorse this bill and encourage the General Assembly to make similar expansions to the general Homestead Exemption for non-veteran homeowners aged 65 and older and homeowners who are totally and permanently disabled. The current income requirement of \$34,600 per household does not capture enough of the homeowners who face the difficult decision about how to live on limited, fixed incomes. Health concerns, general cost of living, and housing maintenance and alteration all contribute to the extremely tight budgets that many older and disabled homeowners must hold themselves to. Property taxes should not be the reason that someone loses their home. The income eligibility threshold for the senior and disabled persons homestead exemption should be increased to \$60,000 per year, as proposed in H.B. 99 in the last general assembly.

Conclusion

The enhanced homestead exemption for veterans provides a popular and critical protection for a population vulnerable to housing instability and homelessness. The improvement proposed in S.B. 335 will greatly increase access to this program at a time when cost of living and housing costs are growing exponentially. I urge your passage of this bill as an important step to support our veterans, and consequently many older adults and adults with disabilities, who have sacrificed much and continue to contribute a great deal to our state and local communities.

Never hesitate to contact me directly at AuditorStinziano@franklincountyohio.gov or 614-525-5700.

Sincerely,

Michael Stinziano,
Franklin County Auditor

²[Ohio Veterans Experiencing Housing Cost Burden](#), Ohio Housing Finance Agency (2019)

³<https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/cost-burdens-among-older-adults-are-all-time-high> (Released in 2019, based on data from 2012-2017).