

Morgan County Ohio Veterans Service Office Commission

135 S. Kennebec Ave. McConnelsville, Ohio 43756

December 3, 2023

Opposition Letter to Ohio House Bill 69, introduced by Representative Brian Stewart and Representative Bernard Willis.

Chairman Loychik, Vice Chairman Demetriou, Ranking Member Miller and Members of the House Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committee – Thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony.

My name is Mr. Robert Stout. I am an Army combat veteran, retired rank of Sergeant Major and currently on the Morgan County Veterans Service Office (VSO) Commission in McConnelsville, Ohio. I am also a Life Member of the VFW, the American Legion, the DAV and the Special Forces Association.

It is disappointing to say the least that House Bill 69 is still moving forward. House Bill 69 restructures the statewide program and in so doing, alienates our senior veterans. The senior veterans we are talking about come from; “The greatest generation,” Korean War veterans, Vietnam War Veterans, Cold War veterans, all of those prior to September 11, 2001. Have the Vietnam veterans not been disowned enough when they first came home? War is hell. Why do we want to show favoritism between those that served? If this bill passes, do we later on disregard the post 9-11 veterans for newer veterans from new recent conflicts of the future? We need not do this divisive act! Time is already working on it. Our senior veteran from the Korean War on our commission retired years ago. Our Purple Heart Vietnam Veteran retired then also. Our Morgan County VSO Commission has 4 of its 5 commissioners that are post 9-11 veterans. This happened naturally over time. Please don’t regard any veterans as less worthy or more worthy. How do we say, Pearl Harbor veterans you are not needed, Frozen Chosin veterans you are not needed, Hamburger Hill veterans you are not needed, Black Hawk Down veterans you are not needed? It is simply wrong to do this with veterans.

The second part of House Bill 69 alters the appointment process. It mandates appointment of 1 VSO commissioner by the local Board of County Commissioners. Why should we want these appointments to become political? The Common Pleas Judge that appointed our Morgan VSO commissioners was a combat veteran. Conversely, none of our Board of County Commissioners for the past 50 years have been veterans. That in its self is not necessarily a problem. However, ALL Board of County Commissioners are politicians. Why do we want VSO Commissioners to become politicians? We don’t! The VSO Commissioners need to focus on veteran needs first and foremost. The past week my colleagues and I spent time talking with our local Board of County Commissioners about the VSO budget. Clearly the local Board of County

Morgan County Ohio Veterans Service Office Commission

135 S. Kennebec Ave. McConnellsville, Ohio 43756

Commissioners wanted to keep part of or reduce the VSO Budget which is mandated by law and not in their purview.

This is why we, The Veterans Service Office Commissioners, need to be a separate entity and not aligned with, assigned by, or owing any political favors to the local Board of County Commissioners.

In summary, House Bill 69 should stop right now before it damages the way our 88 County Veterans Service Offices perform their duties to support veterans in Ohio.

Your consideration to oppose House Bill 69 is greatly appreciated.

I also wish to thank the Committee for your time. If there are any questions, I will be happy to answer them.

Yours In Service,

Robert Stout

Morgan County Veterans Service Office Commissioner

robt.stout@gmail.com

602-501-9426