

December 1, 2023

Honorable Mike Loychik, Chair
House Armed Services &
Veterans Affairs Committee
Ohio House of Representatives

Honorable Steve Demetriou, Vice Chair
House Armed Services &
Veterans Affairs Committee
Ohio House of Representatives

Honorable Adam Miller, Ranking Member
House Armed Services &
Veterans Affairs Committee
Ohio House of Representatives

Re: **Opposition to House Bill 69**

Dear Chair Loychik, Vice Chair Demetriou and Ranking Member Miller:

There should never be a reason to specify which veterans take precedence over other veterans, and never a reason to prioritize one group of veterans over another group.

The Veterans Service Commission was established in 1886 to follow Abraham Lincoln's creed "to care for him that has borne the battle, and his widow or orphan." Veterans owe a special trust to our brothers and sisters in service, and their families. The reasons put forward for the creation of two new seats for post-9/11 veterans are 1) an enormous increase in conflicts, 2) a corresponding increase in Ohio's veteran population, and 3) the suggestion that veteran service commissioners are out of touch with younger veterans, specifically, those serving post-9/11. These premises for the bill are wildly inaccurate and insulting to older veterans. The change in the method of the appointment process for these proposed new seats (by county commissioners instead of common pleas courts) raises additional questions with HB 69.

The Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Officers opposes this legislation because the number of conflicts has not measurably increased since 9/11. Ohio's veteran population has actually decreased, and there is no disparity of representation for post-9/11 veterans on veterans service commissions. The staffs of these veterans service commissions are significantly well represented by those younger veterans.

First, many more conflicts have occurred post-Vietnam and before 9/11 than since 9/11. While there were different campaign names for different years, and they were certainly long and as horrific as any war, the major conflicts post-9/11 have been Iraq and Afghanistan.

If we use 1975 as the end of the Vietnam “era,” there have been “conflicts” in Lebanon, Korea, Zaire, Iran, Sinai, El Salvador, Libya, Sinai, Lebanon (again), Egypt, Grenada, Honduras, Chad, Persian Gulf, Italy, Libya (again), Honduras, Panama, Libya (again!), Columbia, Philippines, Panama, Liberia, Saudi Arabia, and then Iraq in in 1991.

In the 1990s, in addition to the 1st Gulf War in Iraq, there were conflicts in Zaire, Sierra Leone, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kuwait, Bosnia, Somalia, Macedonia, Haiti, Central Africa, Albania, Congo and Gabon, Sierra Leone, Cambodia, Kenya and Tanzania, Liberia, East Timor, Serbia, Nigeria, and Yemen.

Therefore, comments regarding more conflicts or involvement are not factually correct. While the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were certainly long and large campaigns, it cannot be said that those who served throughout the world before them deserve any less respect, and they should stand on equal footing with all veterans.

Second, the veteran population in Ohio has not increased since 9/11. In fact, from 2001 to 2021 the veteran population dropped 35%, from 1,114,595 to 725,991. The census actually places the number below 700,000 (666,320)¹. Therefore, the premise there has been a corresponding increase in Ohio’s veteran population also must fail, as it too is not factually correct.

The third premise, that Veteran Service Commissioners are out of touch with younger veterans seems to be a sort of catch all, seemingly impossible to prove or disprove without mere speculation or conjecture. Ohio’s veteran service commissions have evolved over time. Once heavy with World War II Veterans and Korean War Veterans, those seats have naturally been filled by attrition, by the veterans that have served since. Unfortunately, no seats are filled by WW II Veterans, only a handful of Korean War Veterans fill seats, and there has even been a decrease in Vietnam Veterans’ seats. All this had led to a natural increase in seats filled by post-Gulf War and post-9/11 Veterans.

Here are the general statistics from the Ohio Department of Veterans Services (as of March 2023):

Veteran Service Commissioners:

436 VSC – 4 seats vacant

Pre-Gulf War Veteran [<1990]	298	68%
Post-Gulf War Veterans [=>1990]	138	32%
Pre-9/11 Veterans	358	82%
Post-9/11 Veterans	78	18%

Veteran Service Commission Staff (without Drivers):

384 Staff without 162 Drivers unless dual role.

¹ See <https://data.census.gov/table?tid=ACSDP5Y2021.DP02&g=040XX00US39> for Ohio, 2021.

Pre-Gulf War Veteran [<1990]	63	16%
Post-Gulf War Veterans [=>1990]	321	84%
Pre-9/11 Veterans	173	45%
Post-9/11 Veterans	211	55%

It seems one of the responsibilities veteran service commissions are good at is hiring: They've hired staffs, those that work on the front lines with their County's veterans, that are 55% post-9/11 veterans and 84% post-Gulf War veterans. To say they are out of touch with younger veterans, while they hire younger veterans to perform the day to day tasks of helping veterans, their widows and orphans, with all that entails, appears antithetical. Depending on the statistics used, post-Gulf War Veterans, to include post-9/11 Veterans, represent 32% of Ohio's Veteran Service Commissioners, while post-9/11 Veterans by themselves represent 18% to 20% of these seats.

According to the VA, and again depending on which VA statistics one uses, there are between 13.5% and 14.3% post-9/11 veterans. Any higher figures used are taking into consideration that about half of those that served in Iraq and/or Afghanistan performed multiple tours and they were counted for each tour. Therefore, post-9/11 veterans are already properly represented, and they will naturally assume all seats over time.

It is our opinion that to state veteran service commissions are out of touch with younger veterans, when younger veterans make up about one-fifth of them, and are hiring younger veterans to help all veterans, is wrong, misguided and merely an excuse to help push this legislation along.

A final point, one not addressed at all by the proponents of this legislation, or those seemingly in support of it, is that nobody has stated why the County Commissioners would suddenly be involved in the appointment process. Misstating the facts in an attempt to place one set of Veterans on the commissions is one thing, but then suggesting they should be so placed by county commissioners is another. Is the real reason for this legislation then, not to advance one group of veterans over another, but to get a foothold for county commissioners into the appointment process?

If, hypothetically, the post-9/11 issue was resolved in accord with this proposed legislation, what reasoning would support a change in the appointment process? None has been suggested, most likely because the system is not broken, has worked for decades, and will continue to work into the future. Providing successful and meaningful service to our Veterans should not suffer from the politics of county commissioner appointments.

In considering this legislation, one must ask the question, is one veteran's service or conflict more important or meaningful than another's?

Is it fair that Gulf War Veterans, Vietnam Veterans and Korean War Veterans, Congressionally Chartered organizations specifically named in the appointment process would now be passed over for consideration of appointment to only post-9/11 veterans?

Doesn't this legislation disfavor older veterans?

Is this proposed legislation consistent with Title 38 of the U.S. Code, which prohibits discrimination against veterans?¹ In fact, HB 69 seems to pit one group of veterans against another.

Additionally, Title 5901 does NOT require a post to nominate a MEMBER of that Post. The post nominates a “representative” to represent them. It is not uncommon to have a Veterans Service Commissioner who is nominated by ALL of that organization’s posts within a county.

Another point for consideration is how many post-9/11 veterans would find a part-time position suitable to their lifestyle? Some may, but would the majority of them? Even many of them?

The Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Officers and the Ohio State Association of Veterans Service Commissioners have asked the sponsors to help us understand what problem they see would be solved by this bill. There is no evidence that post-9/11 veterans are underserved, underrepresented, or misunderstood. Nor has any rationale been provided to show how appointment by a board of county commissioners, rather than common pleas judges, would solve any problem allegedly presented as to post-9/11 veterans.

Driving a new wedge between groups of veterans by adding one group over another is taking decades’ worth of progress backwards: Such distinctions should never again be made in America, and certainly not in Ohio! Ironically, one organization which would be most adversely affected, the Vietnam Veterans of America, has as its motto, “Never Again. Never Again Shall One Generation of Veterans be Abandoned by Another.”

Our OEF/OIF veterans are not only experiencing a period in our Nation’s history where the most benefits ever offered presently exists, but they are also well represented in our offices and on our VSCs. In large part this is due to aggressive push to take care of ALL Veterans made by our Vietnam Veterans, over decades and decades of service.

This proposed bill does a disservice to our veterans’ organizations and our fellow veterans. The veterans who serve in the veterans service organizations the ORC 5901 lists for the common pleas judges to appoint from have demonstrated their sincere interest in serving veterans in their

¹**Title 38 prohibits discrimination 4301. Purposes; sense of Congress**

(a) The purposes of this chapter are—

- (1) to encourage noncareer service in the uniformed services by eliminating or minimizing the disadvantages to civilian careers and employment which can result from such service;
- (2) to minimize the disruption to the lives of persons performing service in the uniformed services as well as to their employers, their fellow employees, and their communities, by providing for the prompt reemployment of such persons upon their completion of such service; and
- (3) to prohibit discrimination against persons because of their service in the uniformed services.

(b) It is the sense of Congress that the Federal Government should be a model employer in carrying out the provisions of this chapter.

communities by giving their time and leadership skills in that organization. Post-9/11 veterans can join the majority of those organizations.

This bill is presently unnecessary; it should be defeated.

The Ohio Association of County Veterans Service Officers strongly and respectfully request you oppose House Bill 69.

Respectfully,

/s/ Timothy Espich

Timothy Espich,
President
The Ohio State
Association of County
Veteran Service
Officers