



# **LORAIN COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE COMMISSION**

*Commissioners: Stephen W. Bansek, Joseph A. Gee Sr., Sara Markle, Jose Torres, Samuel Wolfe*

## **Testimony of Jacob Smith Executive Director Lorain County Veterans Service Commission**

**Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committee- Ohio House  
Tuesday December 5, 2023  
Hearing Room 0017 1:00 PM**

I am here to explain why the passage of Ohio House Bill 69 is not to the benefit of Ohio's veterans. If passed into law, this bill would make a significant change: as amended, it requires at least one commission member to have served after 9/11.

Prima Facie, the bill argues that the Veteran Service Commissions around the state do not give younger vets a say in the operation of these offices. This implies that these younger vets have little input on the decisions made by the commissions. As a 9/11 veteran working as the Director in Lorain County, I can tell you nothing could be further from the truth. In addition to myself, the deputy director, who just returned from deployment this year, and five other employees in our office are post-9/11 vets. No issue is presented to the board for consideration, which has not first passed through a post-9/11 veteran for review. To say that we, as post-9/11 vets, don't have a "seat at the table" demonstrates a lack of practical understanding in of day-to-day operations at County Veteran Service Commissions.

According to the Ohio State Association of Veteran Service Commissioners, as of March of 2023, 11% of all veterans on the veteran service commissions around the state were post-9/11 veterans. In fact, in my county, 40% of my board is post-9/11 veterans. According to the same report, the most significant percentage of veteran service commissioners are those veterans who served in or during Vietnam; they comprise 63% of the commission positions, down 1% from the previous year. It is also important to point out that according to the Department of Veterans Affairs, the population of Post 9/11 veterans living in Ohio is 98,503 of the 729,645 veterans calling Ohio home. This means that 13.5% of all veterans in the

State are Post 9/11 veterans. Sure, we are 2.5% low, but this legislation would increase our representation to at least 20%, giving post-9/11 veterans more say than they have the numbers to support.

Another thing to remember is something about these Vietnam Veterans as a whole. This group of veterans has done more to better the lives of veterans who have served both before and especially those who have served after them. It is because of these Vietnam veterans, whose motto is *"Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another..."* that the VA is now recognizing mental health as a significant issue affecting veterans. Our Vietnam veterans carry the weight of leadership in the veteran organizations around this state and nation. If this bill is passed, it would be yet another slap in the face to those who served in and during Vietnam, saying to them that the state feels that they do not have the best interest of all veterans at heart.

Additionally, it is essential to note that the veteran service commissioner job requires a fair amount of time and stress with generally little pay. Most of the 9/11 veterans, myself included, are currently responsible for raising a family with small children and working full-time jobs. Most of us don't have an employer to allow us to attend meetings during the day, and our children's schedule forces us to be in other places at night and on the weekend. This will change as time passes, children grow, and God calls more of these Vietnam veterans home. My generation will begin to assume more of the mantle of leadership on the commissions. Until that day, I have confidence in placing my trust in the leadership of my older brothers and sisters, and in truth, all of you should, too.

I am here today to speak against House Bill 69 for these reasons. I look forward to any questions you may have.