

**Ohio House of Representatives**  
**Finance Subcommittee on Transportation**  
**Proponent Testimony for State Standing Budget Appropriations**  
**for the Disabled American Veterans, Department of Ohio**  
**March 21, 2023**

Committee Chair Patton, Ranking Minority Member Skindell, Committee Members Cutrona, Grim and Robb Blasdel:

My name is Mike Stith. I serve as Adjutant of the Disabled American Veterans, the "DAV," Department of Ohio. We are one of the smaller Veterans Service Organizations but one of the most active. Thank you for allowing me to speak before the Committee.

Many of you know us, or know of us, from seeing our name and emblem on vans you see on Ohio's roads and highways. Those vans transport veterans to Veterans Administration (VA) hospitals and clinics for medical care, at no cost to those veterans. Our current order for hospital vans will place new vans in service in Huron, Crawford and Carroll counties. We are providing two 12-passenger vans and three 7-passenger vehicles, two with 4x4 transmissions. Those vans are being purchased in part with State appropriated funds.

In addition to hospital transportation, our hospital volunteers assist patients at every major VA Medical Facility and at the Ohio veterans' homes in Sandusky & Georgetown. Our assistance includes distribution of supplies and niceties purchased with funds from our State appropriation.

Providing those vans and coordinating those volunteers are part of the DAV's mission, to help build better lives for our nation's disabled veterans and for their widows and orphans. For the last one hundred years, we have assisted veterans in these and other ways.

The DAV Department of Ohio is essential to DAV's mission. Through our State office, located on Chestnut Street here in Columbus, we coordinate various activities and services. We provide those services free of charge to all veterans, regardless of whether they are members of our organization. Feel free to stop by anytime. We are open and glad to explain our operations.

Veterans and their families know the DAV principally for guiding veterans through the complexities of preparing and prosecuting claims with the VA for service-connected disabilities (for disabling injuries incurred in service). We also assist with claims for non-service-connected assistance (provided to ill or incapacitated veterans in financial need) and for securing dependent indemnity compensation (provided to surviving dependents of seriously injured veterans).

In CY 2022, DAV's Cleveland Regional Office, which is funded through our national organization, served as representative in veterans' claims that obtained or retained \$796,633,020 in retroactive and first year service-connected disability compensation, Dependent Indemnity Compensation and non-service-connected veterans' Pension and Survivor Pension claims. Our Regional Office also assisted veterans during VA reviews of their existing service-connected disability claims so as to retain benefits. In 2022, we assisted veterans in obtaining \$27,623,278 in educational benefits and \$2,156,618 in

clothing allowances. These are federal government benefits that are provided to and spent by your constituent Ohio veterans, to the betterment of the State's economy. These figures are provided by the US Department of Veterans Affairs, not by us.

We participate in providing those services through meetings throughout the State at which Chapter Service Officers (CSOs) provide local claims assistance. Also, at seven of Ohio's VA medical facilities, DAV Department Service Officers (DSOs) assist veterans with preparation and submission of service-connected disability claims and other benefit applications. The vast majority of our claims work is done by the DAV Cleveland Regional Office, with all CSO & DSO claims sent to that office for review and subsequent filing with the VA. Our Department Service Officers' wages are paid with State appropriation funds.

We recognize that county Veterans Service Commissions and other organizations do this same work, often naming the DAV as the veterans' representative for hearings. I cannot say how much or how many applications are directly attributable to DAV activities supported by the State appropriation. I can say that, pre-pandemic, DAV's Cleveland Regional Office attributed 35% of its new claims volume to our DAV Ohio's CSOs and DSOs. Also, that DAV Ohio's CSO/DSO programs are DAV Ohio's greatest line-item expenditure, a status rivaled only by our expenditure in purchasing hospital vans.

In FY 2021 alone, the VA disbursed \$3,070,000,000 in compensation and pension benefits to Ohio's veterans, your constituents. That's \$3 billion annually, attributable to all sources. That figure does not include any of the other mentioned benefits we obtain, or the federal cost of hospitals and clinics that provide medical care to Ohio's veterans. The return on investments, such as the State appropriation, is immense!

DAV's activities include petitioning the federal government for legislation recognizing injuries suffered during armed forces service, such as the maladies caused by Agent Orange exposure to Vietnam veterans and by exposure to radiation, or (recognized more recently) to toxins emitted by burn pits.

These and other of our services are beneficial to Ohio's veterans and to their dependents. In a different sense, our services are beneficial to the State at large, in that VA hospital care, service-connected disability claim compensation and VA benefits leave our veterans with funds to use for other purposes.

Inflation is increasing our expenses while effectively decreasing our assets. Please continue to support a State appropriation for the Disabled American Veterans, as we continue to support our State's armed forces veterans, to their physical and mental betterment, and to their and the State's financial betterment. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak on this matter. It was an honor to do so.

Respectfully submitted,

*Michael R. Stith*

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