

Testimony of LCDR Karl D. Feldmann, USPHS
In Support of HB 126

Chair Roemer, Vice Chair Merrin, Ranking Member Troy, and all honorable members of the House Ways & Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present proponent testimony on HB 126.

My name is Karl Feldmann and I have been a resident of the State of Ohio since 1990. I am an honorably discharged veteran of the United States Army where I served as an enlisted Infantryman with deployments to Panama, Honduras, Puerto Rico, and South Korea. [I completed my Army service in 1987 and joined the Commissioned Corps of the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) in 2015]. My current rank is Lieutenant Commander and my category is Environmental Health Officer. I am on active duty and currently stationed in Cincinnati, Ohio serving as an Industrial Hygienist with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), which is one of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

As a commissioned officer in the USPHS I have two duties; the first is to the agency I am assigned; in this case, NIOSH. These duties are focused on protecting America's workforce from chemical, physical, and biological hazards. I am also a member of a NIOSH first-responder team trained and ready to respond to anthrax-related emergencies and a CDC Public Health Support Team to respond to hemorrhagic fever outbreaks such as Ebola and Marburg viral diseases.

My second duty is to the nation itself. Every USPHS officer is assigned a deployment role to respond to public health emergencies, as the USPHS has a national response role under Emergency Support Function (ESF) #8 – *Public Health and Medical Services of the National Response Plan*. We are on-call to deploy every five months. In July 2015, I was deployed by my parent agency (CDC) for 30 days to Sierra Leone where I provided infection prevention and control training and support to USAID and UKAID employees as well as Sierra Leonean health care workers in the district of Kambia. That deployment was in response to the Ebola viral disease epidemic in West Africa. In February 2020, I was among the USPHS officers assigned to NIOSH who were first out the door to respond to COVID-19. We established the quarantine sites for repatriated citizens returning from Wuhan, China. I deployed again in April of that year to help protect poultry workers in Delaware and in August 2020 to help protect correctional workers in Louisiana. I and other USPHS officers assigned to NIOSH continued to deploy in support of agency and headquarters missions to promote, protect, and advance the health of the nation during the three years since then. To quote the USPHS March "In the silent war against disease no truce is ever seen." USPHS officers assigned to NIOSH were called upon soon

after to provide support in response to monkeypox outbreaks nationwide, blastomycosis infections in Michigan, and the train derailment here in East Palestine, Ohio.

From its beginnings with Marine Hospitals in Cleveland and Cincinnati, and the Stream Pollution Research Station in Cincinnati; to its modern role in public health research and delivery of healthcare to the vulnerable and underserved; the officers of the Commissioned Corps of the USPHS have long been a part of Ohio. In the past 22 years, officers stationed in Ohio have played a vital role in public health emergency response, including responding to the September 11 attacks and anthrax attacks; to natural disaster responses like Hurricane Katrina in 2005; the Haitian Earthquake and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010; Superstorm Sandy in 2012; Unaccompanied Minors in 2014, and 2020-2022; prolonged and repeated deployments to West and Central Africa and throughout the United States in 2014-2015, and 2019-20 as part of the Ebola viral disease response; Zika virus responses in the US, the Caribbean, and Central and South America; responses to recent hurricanes in Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico and The U.S. Virgin Islands, resettlement of refugees from Afghanistan, and the recent train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio.

I am here today to speak in support of HB 126, which would amend the Ohio Revised Code to include the military pay of members of the commissioned corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and U.S. Public Health Service in the state's "active duty" exemption from municipal income tax. The intention of House Bill 126 is simply to change the Ohio Revised Code to use the term "uniformed services" instead of "armed forces" as it applies to exempting active-duty earnings from municipal income tax.

The Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Corps are two of the eight uniformed services of the United States, along with the more familiar Armed Forces. The USPHS Commissioned Corps and NOAA Corps are the only uniformed services that consist only of commissioned officers. USPHS officers wear the same uniforms as the United States Navy and the United States Coast Guard (when assigned to the Coast Guard), with USPHS insignia. As a sea service, we hold ranks equivalent to officers of the Navy. USPHS officers typically receive direct commissions and attend a two-week Basic Officer Training Course. NOAA officers complete a 14-week Officer Candidate School with Coast Guard officer candidates. USPHS and NOAA officers are afforded the same rights and privileges as commissioned officers in the Armed Forces, with equivalent pay and benefits. Active-duty service in the USPHS and NOAA Corps is considered to be military service under federal law, and we are accorded veterans status when we complete our service. In seeking your support for HB 126, we are asking that Ohio recognize our service and grant us parity under law with the Armed Forces.

HB 126 would have very little impact on income taxes collected by Ohio municipalities. There are only 54 active-duty Public Health Service officers and two members of the Ready Reserve

who live and work in Ohio. Twenty-five of the 54 Public Health Service officers who live and work in Ohio are assigned to NIOSH in Cincinnati. Among those 25, 15 live in communities that do not levy an income tax. Of the 10 officers who do pay municipal income tax, four live in Cincinnati, two are residents of Wyoming, Ohio; and one each live in Amberly Village, Mason, Montgomery, and Springboro. Anecdotally, some of those officers report that they do not pay taxes after meeting with or writing to their local tax authorities and informing them of their active duty status in a uniformed service. If those data are reflective of the other 29 USPHS officers who live and work in Ohio, HB 126 would not cost very much, and that cost would not fall heavily upon any one municipality.

In short, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, passing HB 126 would not only correct the Ohio Revised Code and treat all Uniformed Services members equally in terms of municipal taxes, but it can also be the next step in bringing parity to all service members in the great state of Ohio.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony, and I look forward to answering any questions the Committee may have.

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