

Proponent Testimony for H.B. 254

Property Tax exemption for Permanent and total 100% Disabled Veterans

Chairmen Roemer, Deputy Chairmen Lorenz, Ranking member Troy, and members of the house ways and means committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on Bill H.B. 254.

My name is Lee Gidden. I am a 100% disabled Veteran, with several friends who are also 100% Disabled Veterans or disabled veterans with unemployability. I am also the Benefits Protection Team Leader for The Disabled American Veterans, Department of Ohio. I have been in this position for two years, in which I chair the committee and work with legislators on a local, state, and congressional level to get or keep benefits for disabled veterans. The Disabled American Veterans is 103 years old with chapters in all 50 states and in most of our territories. The DAV started right here in Ohio.

I started my military career in the Wyoming National Guard. In 1987 I fought the forest fire in Yellowstone National Park where I fell victim to smoke inhalation and heat exhaustion. That was the beginning of the end of my military career. When my contract was up with the National Guard, I joined the Army as a Military Policeman and was stationed at Ft. Bliss, Texas where we frequently trained with tear gas. This was around the time Desert Storm occurred. When the Army asked soldiers to go, I volunteered. While taking my physical training test, I could not finish due to difficulty breathing. That was the final blow to my military career. I was released from service at 10% disability. 3 months later I received a letter from the V.A. increasing my disability to 30%. That was May 1991. In the years that followed, I learned to limit my everyday activities to prevent breathing difficulties with the use of limited medication. In April 2015, I woke up and could hardly breathe. No meds or rest would help. I went to work. My wife had to come and get me and take me to the hospital. It took 2 breathing treatments and an emergency inhaler to get my breathing somewhat normal. I was told to see my regular VA Doctor. I was unable to go a week until my scheduled doctor's appointment. I ended up in the emergency room again for the same symptoms. I decided I could no longer keep up at this pace and needed help. The DAV filed for a reevaluation of my disability and in October of 2015, I received my 100% permanent and total disability.

My jobs have always been blue collar. Mostly living paycheck to paycheck. Receiving my increase in my disability helped, but I had to stop working as a body shop estimator to avoid being around dust and paint fumes. While working I would have to carry a stool to sit down every few feet to catch my breath.

I am on my second marriage. I did not choose the city in which we live as my wife owned the home I moved into. Tallmadge has the second highest property tax rate for Summit county. The property where our home is located was annexed from Portage county where the property

tax rate is slightly higher than Tallmadge. We are required to pay our property taxes to Portage county. This doesn't include any levies that may be passed for the school system but is billed as part of our property taxes. Our City only has 18,600 people in it and yet we spend \$10,000 per year per student in the school system. My taxes and insurance together equal almost as much as the actual house payment.

This legislation would be very beneficial for me and other veterans. I feel that any person that owns property and has served in the military and has been deemed 100% disabled by the Veterans Administration should receive this benefit. We gave part of ourselves to the service of our country and are no longer able to participate fully in life due to our military acquired disabilities. If we hadn't served, we wouldn't be disabled.

At one time Ohio was considered to be one of the best states to live in, if you were a disabled Veteran. We are not even in the top 5 anymore. Not even in the top 10 for just veteran status. The reason for this is that veterans are leaving the state, moving to one of the 18 states that cover 100% of property taxes for those with 100% permanent and total disabilities. With these departures, goes revenue, commitment to community, and safety.

Very few people join the service, especially in today's military. Even fewer become disabled veterans. We joined the service to serve our country. Most of us would do it again to the best of our ability. We have given part of our lives and now give part of our tomorrows because of the decision we made to help protect our way of life, here in America. The federal Government does not control Property tax, Each State Legislature does. That is why I am here today in support of H.B. 254. Please pass this important legislation to help a group of individuals that once helped you.

Thank you for listening.

W. Lee Gidden

Disabled American Veterans

Department of Ohio

Benefits Protection Team Leader

100% Disabled Veteran