

**Proponent Testimony on House Bill 254**  
**House Ways and Means Committee**

James Powers, Founder, Vet-Up / Veterans Stepping Up for Change  
November 28th, 2023

Chairman Roemer, Ranking Member Troy, and Esteemed Members of the House Ways and Means Committee – Thank you for holding this hearing and providing the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 254.

My name is James Powers. I am a combat disabled veteran who served almost 12 years in the Army, encompassing both Active Duty and service here in the Ohio Army National Guard. I have been a staunch advocate for veterans going back to 2011. I have previously provided testimony to the US Senate Committee on Veteran Affairs regarding issues facing veterans in 2017. I dedicate much of my life to working with local and national level veterans organizations to address veteran and service member related needs and issues. Just last year I was part of the many veterans who helped get the SFC Heath Robinson PACT Act passed. I also have a professional understanding of homestead act exemptions from previously being a licensed mortgage broker. I also hear from veterans regularly from across the state who look to me as a Peer Support. But most importantly I am one of the many disabled veterans here in Ohio that would directly benefit from the changes proposed in HB 254.

Providing property tax exemption to disabled veterans in Ohio is not just a matter of compassion; it's a strategic investment in the well-being of those who have sacrificed for their country. Ohio, is home to the 5th highest veteran population, with approximately 725,000 veterans, a significant number face disabilities resulting from their military service. These disabilities, whether physical or mental, often pose barriers to regular employment, making financial stability a pressing concern.

HB 254 proposes adjustments to Ohio's current Homestead Exemption, aiming to broaden its scope to better accommodate disabled veterans. These changes would align Ohio's Veteran Homestead Exemption more closely with benefits available in other states, offering crucial financial relief to disabled veterans on fixed incomes.

The average home value in our state is \$218,000. This means a mortgage payment of about 1200 dollars per month. IT also means an approximately \$2600 annual tax bill or a little over 200 dollars a month. Lastly we add the required homeowners insurance which on average is about 100 dollars per month. This is where a problem tends to arise. A 100% disabled veteran is typically beyond the debt to income(DTI) ratio for a loan to buy a home. So by passing this bill,

it would serve as a way to help more disabled veterans qualify for homeownership by reducing DTI for loan qualifications.

Passing legislation to expand property tax exemption for disabled veterans in Ohio is not just a compassionate gesture. It's an opportunity for the state to lead in honoring its veterans and ensuring they can thrive post-service, contributing to the prosperity of the Buckeye State.

I thank this committee for the opportunity to speak regarding HB 254. I appreciate your consideration on such an important issue and would be happy to answer any questions to provide additional perspective on the issue.