

**The Ohio Senate
General Government Committee
Proponent Testimony for State Standing Budget Appropriations
for the Disabled American Veterans, Department of Ohio
May 9, 2023**

Committee Chair Rulli, Ranking Minority Member DeMora, Committee Members Shuring, Gavarone and McColley:

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 on HB 33.

Many of you know us, or know of us, from seeing DAV's name and emblem on vans you see on Ohio's roads and highways. Those vans transport veterans to US Department of Veterans Affairs ("VA") hospitals and clinics for medical care, at no cost to the veteran. Our current order for hospital vans will place five new vans in service in Huron, Crawford and Carroll counties. Those vans are 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 meeting with, listening to and conversing with patients, as well as providing supplies and niceties purchased in part with funds from the 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.

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 while serving with the armed forces of the United States). 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). All of our assistance is provided at no charge to veterans or to their dependents.

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 \$797 million [\$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 \$28 million [\$27,623,278] in educational benefits and \$2 million [\$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 VA, not by us.

We participate in providing those services through monthly meetings throughout the State at which Chapter Service Officers provide local claims assistance. Also, at seven of

Ohio's VA medical facilities, DAV Department Service Officers 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 of our Service Officer claims sent to that office for review and subsequent filing with the VA. Our Department Service Officers' modest 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 or their dollar amounts 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 Service Officers. Also, that DAV Ohio's Service Officer 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 over \$3 billion [\$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 veterans' benefits, such as VA hospitals and clinics that provide medical care to Ohio's veterans. The return on investments, such as your investment with the State appropriation, is immense!

DAV's activities include visiting, contacting and petitioning federal elected officials for legislation recognizing injuries suffered during armed forces service, such as 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 other VA benefits enlarge Ohio's economy while leaving 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 Ohio'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. It was an honor to do so.

Respectfully submitted,

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