



Department of Ohio, District 12

Nicholette Bolte, Commander

Robert Leach, Quartermaster

TO: Honorable Terry Johnson, Chair, Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee
Honorable Steve Wilson, Vice Chair, Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee
Honorable Hearcel F. Craig, Ranking Member, Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee
Honorable Brian M. Chavez, Member, Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee
Honorable Shane Wilkin, Member, Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee
FROM: Andrea M. Neutzling, Senior Vice Commander, District 12, Veterans of Foreign Wars Dept. of Ohio
DATE: February 26th, 2024
RE: IN PROPONENT TO SCR 8 (135TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY)

Chairman Johnson, Vice Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Craig and Honorable Members Chavez and Wilkin, of the Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Concurrent Resolution 8.

My name is Andrea Neutzling, I am the Legislative Chair and Senior Vice Commander for District 12, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of Ohio. I'm here today on behalf of my District which covers Senate Districts 14, 17 and 30, consisting of Athens, Gallia, Jackson, Lawrence, Meigs, Pike, Ross, Scioto, and Vinton Counties. I am a 100% Service-Connected Army Veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom. I have been advocating for Veterans at a National level since testifying at a Senate Field Hearing on Appalachian Veterans held by Senator Brown in 2010, to helping get the PACT Act passed in 2022. At a state level I have gotten more involved this past year by testifying for and against bills that can benefit or harm the Veteran Community in Ohio.

We're being told that it's taking an average of 102.2 days to complete a Veteran's Disability claim. It doesn't tell us if those are initial claims, new claims being made by a veteran for the first time, or if the claims are for an increase of their current rating. Either way the process is taking a severe toll on the Veteran Community.

Imagine, a single mom done with her almost 10 years in both Active Duty Army and the Army Reserves. She should have been put in for a medical separation/retirement but instead her Reserve unit just lets her end time in service happen. She files for VA benefits for disability compensation due to injuries and illnesses from her time in the Army. While waiting for her ratings she can't afford to live anywhere but with her one of her parents at any given point. They help with childcare so she doesn't have to try and pay for that, but she attends college; trying to get a decent job, because she may have had 10 years of experience as an Intelligence Analyst and had an active Top Secret with SCI security clearance, she wasn't able to get a job in that field due to a lack of a college degree; so she gets her GI Bill but that money goes to the college for her classes, the BAH she gets from the GI Bill goes towards her books and then for any gas for travel to college. She gets some child support, enough for her to get clothes, shoes and food for her child, she also get SNAP but not much about \$116 a month. Finally, after almost 2 years she gets rated at 30%, only a couple of her claims have been above 0% rated, a few are Service Connected but at 0% and one denied completely. But that 30% was enough to change her SNAP from \$116 to \$16 a month. But it did make it so she didn't have to borrow from her parents as much to make it to school. Another 8 months and her rating was changed to 80% and sat there for almost another 4 years while fighting to get her

last claim service connected. Then in 2015 she got her letter stating that her respiratory illnesses were in fact from her time in service and her lungs were so bad that the VA awarded her 100% permanent and total for her respiratory condition alone. This is just a part of my journey to the Veteran standing in front of you today.

In conclusion, I strongly urge the Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee to this pass Concurrent Resolution to urge The President of the United States, The United States Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the United States Congress to take prompt action to reduce the processing time for Veterans' Disability Benefits, so that my story is no one else's reality.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrea M. Neutzling,
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