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Testimony before the Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee

Senate Bill 225—Designate Veterans Suicide Awareness and Prevention Day

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Chairman Johnson, Vice Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify on Senate Bill 225.

I am David Root, a US Navy Veteran of the Vietnam War. I am a State Legislative Chairman for the Department of Ohio Veterans of Foreign Wars and a past State Commander.

On May 16, 2017, State Representative Andy Thompson stood before the House Armed Services, Veterans Affairs, and Homeland Security Committee and gave sponsor testimony on his bill, HB 202. Chairman Johnson and Ranking Member Craig, you may remember his testimony because you were also chairman and ranking member of that committee. For the other members of this committee, that was during the 132nd General Assembly and Representative Thompson's bill created what is now Section 5.481 of the O.R.C.

Representative Thompson stated in his testimony, "It is estimated, that 22 veterans commit suicide every day." That was seven years ago. Just two weeks ago Senator Roegner stated in her sponsor testimony, "Each day, 16-22 veterans are taking their own lives in our country." Two statistics given seven years apart and yet very similar. In the past ten years I have heard the number was as low as 14 per day and as high as 24, but 22 has always been a constant when talking of the number of veterans who kill themselves every day. Whatever the actual number is, it has been going on for too long and the number will always be too high... until that number is zero.

Senator Roegner provided you with statistics on suicides, the suicide hotline, and past state appropriations so I will not spend time reciting more statistics to you, but I will tell you that this epidemic affects all veterans. It does not care what religion they are or the color of their skin. They can be man or women, young or old. No veteran is immune.

I served the Department of Ohio VFW as their state commander for the 2018-2019 term. Tradition has required the state commander to create two lapel pins. One is the commander's pin given to all members and the other is a veteran's pin. The veteran's pin is actually used as a fundraiser for a worthy cause supporting veteran causes. My veteran's pin raised funds for our Veterans Service Department, but it also had a very important meaning. I wanted it to draw attention and awareness to the senseless, sad, disturbing epidemic of veteran suicide.

I attached a copy of it for you. As you can see, it is small and simple, but the message is loud and clear—Stop Veteran Suicide! I have a bag of those pins here and I will give one to anyone who wants to wear that message for others to see.

Chairman Johnson and members of this committee, House Bill 225 is nothing more than a correction

to the Ohio Revised Code. HB 202 already passed in the 132nd General Assembly and became law in 2019. HB 225 simply moves the special day of awareness from the first Saturday in May to the 22nd of September. September is *National Suicide Prevention Month* so the move and adding the word 'prevention' is just common sense. I don't need to tell you why the 22nd was picked. I ask you to please vote in favor of this bill and encourage all your colleagues to do the same.

Thank you again for allowing me to testify today and I will be happy to answer any questions that you might have.

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2018-2019 VETERAN'S PIN

Department of Ohio
Veterans of Foreign Wars
David K. Root, State Commander