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State Senator
14th Senate District



Sponsor Testimony

Senate Bill 179

House Veterans and Military Development Committee

October 8th, 2025

Chairwoman Richardson, Vice Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Lawson-Rowe, and members of the House Veterans and Military Development Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 179.

According to a 2021 report by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitations and Corrections (ODRC), roughly 2,582 veterans are incarcerated here in Ohio, making up 5.97% of our prison population. These are old numbers; however, they were gathered thanks to the Veteran Reentry Search Service.

The Veteran Reentry Search Service (VRSS) is a program already offered by the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs. It allows those in the judicial system to identify and track inmates using their military record. Through this bill, by requiring our correctional institutions to ingrate VRSS into their jail registries, we will always have a clear and accurate accounting for all of our incarcerated veterans. By tracking these individuals, we will be better equipped to

assist them when it comes time for their reentry to civilian life.

Plainly stated, once identified through VRSS, this bill requires our correctional institutions to verify the veteran's status and eligibility, then assist the individual in contacting veteran related services such as the VA, their County Veteran Service Commission, veteran service organizations in their area, a representative of the Veterans Justice Outreach Program, and any other federal, state, or local resources that may be available for the veteran. In addition, the County Veteran Service Commissions will also be required to assist veteran treatment courts in establishing an outreach program.

On another note, as this bill continues to develop, members of the Ohio Judicial Conference made several productive suggestions to amend SB 179. In their recommendations, they requested the inclusion of "any program that is meant to identify veterans" other than VRSS. Some of these alternate programs update more frequently than VRSS, being especially useful for smaller county jails whose populations fluctuate more rapidly than our ODRC institutions. My office is currently working with LSC to draft such an amendment.

This legislation will succeed in connecting our veterans to the essential resources and communities they require to fully reintegrate into civilian life. After all, these individuals have already demonstrated their commitment and service to our country. By giving these veterans a fair

second chance, it is my belief that many will flourish and become truly productive members of society. We owe them that much as Ohio continues to strive to become *the* most military friendly state.

Senate Bill 179 passed unanimously from the Senate Armed Services, Veterans Affairs and Public Safety Committee with no opposition testimony. Likewise, it passed 33-0 from the Senate Floor. I hope to see this legislation passed in its entirety, maintaining the bill's integrity and narrow scope throughout the process.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this bill. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have at this time.