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Chair Roemer, Ranking Member Troy, and esteemed members of the Ohio House Ways and Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 22, otherwise known as the Gold Star Widow Bill. For context, surviving spouses of fallen military service members are commonly referred to as Gold Star Widows or Widowers.

The men and women that serve our country in the armed forces make immense sacrifices, and they leave their family and friends to protect this nation. I, alongside my colleague, and my fellow members of the Ohio House of Representatives, have the utmost respect for these service-members, and I believe that we as a state should take care of them, and their family. House Bill 22 would do just that.

Currently, the state provides homestead exemptions for: individuals over the age of 65, individuals who are permanently and totally disabled, and disabled veterans. This bill would assist the spouses of fallen service members with a full homestead exemption; some these individuals were solely relying on their spouse's income, and others are now raising children as single parents. This bill would greatly impact the lives of these Ohio citizens.

This bill would retroactively help those people who have already lost so much, while also proactively ensuring that future Gold Star Widows are financially assisted. The Homestead exemption would be provided to these spouses unless they remarry someone or cohabitate with another person that is not blood related. This provision was added to ensure that the bill aids those individuals who are truly in need of assistance.

I was approached last General Assembly by Ms. Jane Horton. Ms. Horton lost her husband, Specialist Christopher Horton in 2011, as he was serving in Afghanistan. She has been a massive help during this process. I have also had the privilege of sitting down with Ms. Tiffany Echert, whose husband, Andy Echert, passed away while serving in Iraq. I thank both of these individuals for their courage and their sacrifices throughout their journey.

According to LSC, there are currently around 1,200 individuals in which this exemption would apply to. LSC estimated that if this bill passed last year, it would only have cost the state roughly \$4 million per year. Last General Assembly this committee favorably reported this bill 12-1 and on the House floor we voted nearly unanimously with a 90-1 vote, to pass this bill out of the House. Unfortunately, we could not get this bill across the finish line last year, however, it is my hope that we see this bill on the Governor's table as soon as possible.

Thank you again, Chair Roemer, Ranking Member Troy, and esteemed members of the Ohio House Ways and Means Committee.