



Secretary of State Frank LaRose
Proponent Testimony: House Bill 22

March 5, 2025

Chairman Roemer, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Troy, and members of the Ohio House Ways and Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 22, to provide a full homestead exemption to Gold Star widows and widowers.

From the time of our nation's founding to the present, brave men and women have joined our military to defend and preserve the cause of freedom. Several members of this committee are fellow veterans. You know firsthand that when you volunteer to join our nation's armed forces, you sign on the dotted line to give everything to this country, up to and including your life. Sadly, many of our fellow countrymen and women have made the ultimate sacrifice to preserve our nation's freedoms.

My friend, Jane Horton, lost her husband in service to this country. Mr. Horton gave his life in defense of this nation and his brothers-in-arms on September 9, 2011. Since that terrible day, Ms. Horton has advocated for the United States to care for our Gold Star families. Her patriotism, compassion, and fierce love for her husband serves as an example that all Americans should emulate in the care for the loved ones of our nation's fallen heroes.

Ohio has an opportunity to do more to support our Gold Star families. House Bill 22 establishes a requirement in state law that ensures our Gold Star widows and widowers can qualify for a full homestead exemption, regardless of income. While this would make a significant difference for these families who have sacrificed so much for our freedom, it will not significantly impact the rising cost of property taxes around our state, and I support continued efforts to reduce that burden, but it will provide much needed and well-deserved relief for an estimated Gold Star 1,200 spouses in Ohio.

In President Lincoln's second inaugural address, the president outlined the responsibility our nation must fulfill for those who are left to carry on without their loved ones. He called on those of us left behind "...to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan." You will note these words are quite literally carved in stone in this very building on the Lincoln Vicksburg Monument in the Ohio Statehouse Rotunda. When I returned from Iraq, we landed at Rickenbacker International Airport. As I exited the plane, I saw many Vietnam veterans holding U.S. flags waiting for us to

return home. As we were greeted by these veterans, I asked one of these men why they were there. I will never forget how he replied, and his response remains with me to this day. He said when they returned from Vietnam, they were not greeted with thanks by their fellow Americans, and they were not going to let that happen to us.

Now, this committee and the Ohio General Assembly can send the same message to the Gold Star families who did not have the opportunity to welcome their loved ones home from war. By supporting this legislation, you have the opportunity to tell Ohio's Gold Star families that they are loved; they are cared for; and that we will always remember the sacrifices made in defense of our country and their fellow service members.

House Bill 22 would also continue Ohio's tradition of caring for our military families. Many of these families are mobile and have moved from military installation to military installation. As these Gold Star widows and widowers look to rebuild their lives after such terrible loss, they look for locations that are economically feasible. HB 22 would make our state an even more attractive location for these families to purchase a house and call Ohio home.

I thank Representatives Lorenz and Thomas for sponsoring this important legislation and respectfully urge the committee to favorably report this legislation for final consideration by the full House of Representatives.

Yours in service,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Frank LaRose". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Frank" being larger and more prominent than the last name "LaRose".

Frank LaRose

Ohio Secretary of State