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Chairman Roemer, Vice Chairman Thomas, Ranking Member Troy & Members of the Ways & Means Committee

My name is Larry Moore, and I represent the Summit County Veterans Service Commission.

Since 1930, the funding mechanism for Ohio's county veterans service commissions has remained intact. That funding, through the formula established in Ohio Revised Code Section 5901.11, has benefited veterans and their communities. Not just through much needed and well-deserved assistance and services, but also through the injection of federal dollars to each county to the tune of more than \$8.5 Billion Dollars as of 2023, equating to an almost 1000% return for each dollar spent: That is \$100.00 for every \$1.00 spent by each county.

Not many county agencies bring in federal dollars to the levels that veterans service commissions do. While we do not oppose legislation that is going to benefit any community, we must speak out against such a massive overhaul of the property tax system, which would seriously interfere with the services we currently deliver under ORC Chapter 5901.

House Bill 335 will have serious consequences for all eighty-eight county veterans service commissions. The elimination of local government authority to levy inside millage would wipe out the funding for county veterans service commissions. In 2024, the full millage available to Ohio's veterans service commissions totaled more than \$177 Million Dollars. As evidence of the veterans service commissions' serious understanding of their special fiduciary duty to their taxpayers, they only requested about \$111 Million Dollars, and as even more evidence of their frugality only spent just over \$90 Million Dollars. Where will Ohio's counties separately find \$90 Million Dollars to care for their veterans? In addition, their surviving spouses and children? How drastically will this affect the \$8.5 Billion Dollars brought into the state? How will the loss of the services veterans service commissions provide increase the drain on other state and local services? These are merely a few of the consequences that will follow should the inside millage be removed as our funding mechanism. What other unknown consequences may follow. We respectfully ask if the sponsors of this legislation have addressed, or even considered, all the possible consequences for not only our veterans, but also our schools, sheriffs, townships, cities, police, fire, and other public servants.

Losing this funding would immediately require us to reconsider every facet of our operations, if we even still exist! For example, when VA benefits for disabled veterans cannot be obtained because of inefficiency on the federal VA level, county veterans service commissions have been the only way many veterans, their dependents and spouses, get those benefits. It is well known to the VA and within the veteran community, that more claims are granted when a professional highly trained Veteran Service Officer prepares a veteran's claim, and they are granted at a higher, more appropriate level of disability. There would be a cumulative effect from the federal dollars, which would not come into the counties because VA benefits are lost. This does not even begin to cover all the outreach services we provide



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that would be gone, and our veterans would be abandoned, left to federal red tape for not only their claims work, but with medical issues as well.

Seventeen dollars and fifty cents. That is the full millage available to a county veterans service commission per \$100,000 of market value on a home. The average and median values of homes in Ohio are roughly the same, about \$231,000 in 2024. That equates to just over \$40 in real property tax slated for veterans services, \$20 each half year. As mentioned, however, veterans service commissions did not request all possible millage on a statewide basis. Moreover, in fact, they only spent 51% of the total millage available to them. Therefore, of the thousands of dollars the citizens of Ohio are paying twice a year in property tax, on average they are in reality, only paying \$21 per year to help our veterans, and their widows and children. We submit, this is a small cost we bear in helping those that have secured our freedom and protected our way of life. Ohio has a long history in honoring our veterans, and a system that is often the envy of other states, and their veterans. We should be doing more to help our veterans, not less.

On June 12, the County Auditors Association of Ohio held a briefing in Willoughby, Ohio (Lake County). One presenter, Christopher Galloway, Second Vice President of the Association and Lake County's Auditor, stated veterans service commissions budgets would be "wiped out" by this legislation. In fact, he and another auditor stated sales tax rates would need to approach 20% to make up for the losses suffered. H B 335 only authorizes a one-percentage sales tax increase, far less than needed, and would cause its own dire consequences on citizens and businesses alike.

Moving forward with this reform without a sustainable plan will result in severe, significant, and lasting consequences, not only for county veterans service commissions and our veterans, but also for public institutions across Ohio.

One of the most troubling aspects of this bill is the unrealistic assumption that voters will simply approve new taxes to make up for the lost funding. Once inside millage is returned to property owners, it is incredibly unlikely that voters will turn around and approve a levy to re-fund basic services. That may sound good in theory, but in practice, it is just a backdoor way of telling counties to eliminate services and "live within your means"—which, in this case, means doing without.

I urge you to reject this legislation in full. The people of Summit County deserve better. They deserve a government that can protect their families, respond in a crisis, uphold the law, and sustain the services that make Ohio work.

Thank you.

Larry D. Moore

Executive Director/CVSO