



David K. Root

Legislative Chairman (State)
Department of Ohio Veterans of Foreign Wars

rootohiovfw@gmail.com

Mobile: 440-420-0313

Testimony before the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee
House Bill 96 - To Create Appropriations for Fiscal Years 2026-2027
29 April 2025

Good morning, Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Weinstein and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee. Thank you for the invitation and the opportunity to talk about the Ohio VFW.

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

The VFW is one of 13 Veteran Service Organizations named in the biennium operating budget to receive state GFR funds. The purpose of the GRF funds, according to the Legislative Budget Office is “to help veterans and their dependents identify and claim benefits to which they are entitled” and that is exactly what the VFW does with the funds we receive. The Blue Book further states, “Each organization provides services to its particular constituency.” That however is not what the VFW does. Our Service Officers file claims and assist in any way they can for all veterans and family members regardless of their membership in any veteran organization.

Our Department VSO and VAVS Programs account for approximately one third of the total expenses each year, either directly or indirectly. The GFR funds allocated in the State Operating Budget make up approximately one third of our total income each year. We use those funds precisely as the Budget Office dictates to help veterans and their families identify and claim the benefits they are entitled to.

I would like to point out that all our Department Service Officers are VA accredited. We currently have seven accredited service officers located in Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Dayton. Unfortunately, we are unable to hire a service officer in Columbus on our current budget.

The Veteran Service Office of the Ohio VFW has had to deal with the same problem that everyone in Ohio has –the annual increases in the cost-of-living. When the cost-of-living goes up so does the cost of operating a business and our Veterans Service Office is no exception. The Social Security Cost-Of-Living Adjustment in 2023 was 3.2, in 2024 it was 2.5. What it will be in the next two years is anyone's guess, but most feel that we will have similar increases.

In addition to the increased cost of operating our VSO program, we are also faced with an increase in our workload. The PACT Act, signed into law by President Biden in August of 2022, created a huge increase in cases. Nationwide during the first year alone the VA processed 1.65 million veteran claims with about 460,000 of them being PACT Act claims. That is 16% more than the previous all-time record. The VA enrolled 332,000 veterans in VA health care –nearly 50,000 more than the previous year. That included 113,000 enrollees from the PACT Act alone. During the first year, veterans and survivors submitted 1.95 million claims –a 37% increase of the previous year. In addition, there were 1.65 million ‘intent to file’ forms submitted. That is 44% more than the year before.

There are about 18.3 million veterans in the US and about 3.5% of them live in Ohio. The VFW accredited Service Officers will represent any one of 600,000 veterans that reside in our great state and do everything they can to obtain the benefits entitled to them.

While the VFW is very appreciative of the \$450,000 in state funding, due to the cost-of-living increase in each of the previous two years and the lack of an increase in funds for the next two years we feel it is comparable to a reduction in funding. Increasing the subsidy amount from \$450,000 to \$475,000 would overcome the cost-of-living increases, a larger increase that could allow us to put a much-needed accredited service officer in Columbus to help us overcome the increased workload would be even better.

Everyone wants Ohio to be the best 'veteran friendly state', but if veterans know they cannot get a service officer and be able to file for their benefits in a timely manner, no veteran will consider making Ohio their permanent home.

I respectfully request that the \$450,000 GRF funding for those VSOs that have accredited service officers be reconsidered and replaced with a higher amount that you feel the 2026/2027 Operating Budget can support.

Madam Chair, thank you for allowing me to tell you how the Ohio VFW uses the GFR funds and just how important those funds are for us and for all Ohio veterans. I will answer any questions you might have for me.