

Dirk Harkins, Sr. Veteran Recruiter
JLC Services Inc.
HB 96 Proponent Testimony
In Support of eTMS Funding
May 13, 2025

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston and members of the Senate Health Committee thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of veterans across Ohio who could benefit from the use of EEG guided transcranial magnetic stimulation (eTMS).

My name is Dirk Harkins, and I am a retired SSG of the U.S. Army who proudly served with the 82nd Airborne Division at Ft. Bragg, N.C. This program has allowed me to regain my sense of purpose and value that I once had prior to being deployed. It allowed me to be fully engaged in life and go on to help others who are struggling in Ohio.

In 2019, I tried suicide by cop, fighting with several local sheriff deputies and by the grace of God they didn't shoot or kill me. I made a phone call from jail to a close friend who is also a veteran, I wanted him to get me out of jail so that I could finish what I'd started and take my own life.

But this all started after a deployment and injuries I sustained in Iraq. When I was deployed in 2007, I was part of a Personal Security Detachment Team and was on a combat patrol in Tikrit when my vehicle was engaged with a stack of Improvised Exploding Devices. As a result of the explosion, I suffered several neck, spine, and brain injuries. I was diagnosed with severe Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury and was dealing with severe migraine headaches daily.

Upon being medevac'd home, I was given opioids and other medications that were highly addictive. Before long I was addicted to those pills, but then I also started abusing them because I had slipped into a cycle of depression and addiction. No traditional treatments of medications or talk therapy worked. My anger and suicidal thoughts grew out of control as I slipped more into self-medication mode, trying to suppress these thoughts and feelings by abusing my prescriptions and drinking until I blacked out. My brain never slowed down; I was hypervigilant, always on edge and the people closest to me walked on eggshells because of my outbursts.

When I made that phone call from jail, I was lucky that my friend didn't just bail me out. He recognized that I needed help and got me to Texas, the only place I could go for TMS at that

time. I was skeptical, but I could either try TMS or I could kill myself. Everything else had failed.

Amazing things started happening after my fourth treatment when I woke up for the first time in 12 years without a headache. I started to regain focus and mental alertness instead of constant hypervigilance. After a couple weeks of TMS I read a book from cover to cover without a headache, and I retained the information; for the first time since my injuries in 2007. My sleep patterns became better as I began to get deeper sleep at night. I became less angry. In that time, I was also able to stop using opiates and alcohol. My cravings and need for self-medicating were gone.

I was able to continue receiving eTMS in Ohio thanks to the Ohio legislature and was one of the first patients who received treatment in the eTMS Ohio program. My story is not unique, there are many others out there just like me trying to figure out a battle in our heads we will never win. The staggering number of 22 Veteran Suicides a day is real. We know that the cycle of a veteran returning from deployment to a suicide attempt is around a year and a half. We need to make sure we're catching them early, before the spiral and the need to rebuild their life from the ground up like myself. Since 2019 we've helped over a thousand veterans and first responders receive the help they need, in some cases saving lives. We're providing them with a peer network, free treatment, and most of all, hope.

We also know that opioid use in Ohio continues at epidemic levels. Around 2017, The Columbus Dispatch printed an article "Price Tag of Ohio's Opioid Epidemic: Up to \$8.8 Billion a Year" based on a study done at Ohio State University that Ohio spends between \$6.6 billion to \$8.8 billion a year on the opioid epidemic. A friend Jeff Lindquist has spoken here in the past about his own struggles with opioid addiction and how eTMS saved his life. Nothing else is working.

With the success we have seen from the eTMS Ohio Program, I urge legislature to continue this program. We see the potential that continued funding of the program could have for the men and women who need help. The Ohio legislature has an opportunity to make sure this program continues to operate at full capacity.

I would like to close by saying that I now work for JLC Services Inc. the company that administers the eTMS Ohio program. When we started it cost us \$20,000 per patient. We have gotten the cost down to under \$10,000 per patient. While most companies would realize more profit, our company reinvests the savings so we can treat twice as many patients.

I am lucky to serve JLC Services, I am blessed to help veterans, I am grateful that the legislature has invested in eTMS and I am happy to take questions.