



Committee Minutes

COMMITTEE: Armed Services and Veterans Affairs
CHAIRPERSON: Haraz N. Ghanbari
DATE: November 17, 2021
TIME: 10:00 AM
ROOM: Room 018

Chairman Ghanbari called the committee to order at 1000.

The clerk called the role.

With a quorum present the committee proceeded as a full committee. Following the pledge of allegiance the Chairman took a moment to recognize the unoccupied POW/MIA Chair in the audience.

The Chairman Ghanbari called forward HCR32 forward for its first hearing with Representative Mary Lightbody providing sponsor testimony.

Rep. Lightbody testified that the purpose of the resolution is to recommend that the Air Force Research Lab at Wright Paterson Air Force Base containing the anechoic chamber be designated the "Colonel William J. Cavanaugh Battlefield Acoustics Lab." Rep. Lightbody testified about the late Col. Cavanaugh's storied career and service as well as the significance of the laboratory for preparing soldiers for the sounds of battle.

With no questions the first hearing of HCR32 was concluded.

Chairman Ghanbari called forward SB160 forward for its second hearing.

The Chairman called forward Theresa Bartlett to provide proponent testimony on SB160.

Ms. Bartlett testified that she has served for more than a decade as the Veterans Affairs Liaison at Washington Square Healthcare in Warren, OH and is the mother of a service-related disabled veteran and that Veterans Affairs is near and dear to her heart. She testified to the bipartisan support that there has been for this bill as well as the impact that the bill would have on improving the level of care available for veterans. Ms. Bartlett stated that the bill would only require certain healthcare providers to inform veterans that they may be eligible for certain benefits through the United States Veterans Administration and provide that veteran with information that could help connect them with a specific program within the Veterans Administration.

Rep. Gross stated that she is concerned about the lack of a central resource defining which benefits are available to which veteran. She asked the witness how they would propose to hold providers accountable for providing information on available benefits when no such definitive

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standard exists.

Ms. Bartlett answered that if the Service Officers at the County offices are doing their jobs that the benefits would be communicated effectively. While admitting that the bill does not cure all ills within the current system she believes that it is an important first step in addressing some of these issues.

Rep. Richardson asked what the plan is to help get veteran information from providers to the Veterans Administration. She stated that it is her belief that there should a requirement that the information be re-communicated between providers and the Veterans Administration from time to time.

Ms. Bartlett replied that she believes that the information will naturally be re-communicated through recurring visits to providers.

Ranking Member Miller thanked Ms. Bartlett for her testimony and her son's service in the United States Navy. He asked the witness if she would see value if the committee were to add a provision to the bill which would require the Ohio Department of Veterans Services to liaise with the Ohio Department of Aging to improve communications regarding available benefits. Ranking Member Miller stated that he believes that adding the resources of the Department of Veterans Services would add great value to the bill.

Ms. Bartlett answered that she would be amiable to such an amendment but would be wary to complicate the bill too much for a layperson.

Vice Chair Loychick thanked Ms. Bartlett for her testimony and her son for his service to the United States.

Ms. Bartlett concluded her testimony.

The Chairman invited Kenneth David, Adjutant and Treasurer of DAV Chapter 11, to provide proponent testimony on SB160.

Mr. David testified about his military service as well as his service working with the DAV and how he is continually learning about new federal benefit of which he was previously unaware. He stated that it is his belief that SB160 would greatly assist in connecting veterans with these benefits from the VA.

Chairman Ghanbari stated that he believes that it is vital to provide this information to individuals who may need it. He also stated that it is his concern that the information will be shared only to check a box and that it is his belief that it is crucial to have someone who could help the veteran navigate the information once it has been shared with them.

Mr. David stated that he is a well know individual in Mahoning County and that he talks to many veterans where he is able to tell them where they should turn to for help. He stated that all that veteran service advocates can do is share the information and that it is up to the veteran to decide if they want the help or not.

Rep. Lanese shared an anecdote about two veterans who attempted to receive benefits and how one of them had to hire an attorney to do so. Rep. Lanese stated that this supplements the Chairman's point of the difficulty of navigating the United States Veterans Administration.

Mr. David again stated that the largest obstacle to assisting many veterans is that they do not want to be helped by the Veterans Service Organizations.

Rep. Gross thanked Mr. David for his service. She stated that there is a problem with getting veterans connected with benefits and she asked Mr. David to share what he believes are the top obstacles to reaching those who do not want help and if SB160 would overcome those obstacles.

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Mr. David stated that SB160 is a big stepping stone towards solving the problems he sees. He stated that the bill will serve those veterans seeking help and will serve those who seek help in the future.

Rep. Sheehy asked if there is another state in the Union that serves better than Ohio and if there might be models which Ohio could emulate.

Mr. David answered that he believes that Ohio is one of the best states for veterans services and that some people move to Ohio to enter the Ohio system. He stated that this bill would improve the current system further.

Mr. David concluded his testimony.

Chairman Ghanbari invited Robert Marino Sr., a Veteran of the United States Air Force, forward to provide proponent testimony.

Mr. Marino testified that the bill is not reinventing the wheel or creating any additional work for providers but would only require providers to ask if a patient is a veteran and to provide them with information on benefits they may be entitled to.

Chairman Ghanbari thanked Mr. Marino for his testimony. He noted that there are several ways to verify an individual's veteran status and that these forms can be used as a means to evaluate benefit eligibility. He shared about how difficult it is for state agencies to communicate and share information with one another and asked if there is a possibility of adding an amendment that would make this intercourse less difficult.

With no further witnesses the second hearing of SB160 was concluded.

Chairman Ghanbari called forward HCR27 forward for its second hearing.

The Chairman called forward Arnold Stanko, Veteran of the United States Marine Corps, to provide proponent testimony.

Mr. Stanko shared details of Agent Orange exposure to veterans of the Vietnam War and the health conditions which those veterans now are afflicted with as a direct result of the exposure.

Mr. Stanko testified that the resolution would assist in raising awareness and honoring Ohio Vietnam War veterans exposed to Agent Orange.

Rep. Richardson applauded Mr Stanko for his testimony and asked him if he is receiving all the care he needed in relation to his exposure to Agent Orange.

Mr. Stanko replied that he has been receiving the care that he needs but that his brother passed as a result of Agent Orange exposure.

With no more witnesses the second hearing of HCR27 was concluded.

Chairman Ghanbari called forward HR75 for its second hearing.

The Chairman invited Lisa Hamler-Fuggitt, Executive Director of the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, to provide proponent testimony.

Ms. Hamler-Fuggitt testified about the services that Ohio foodbanks provide to struggling Ohioans and seniors and the challenges that the COVID-19 crises posed to the foodbanks.

During these difficult months the service members of the Ohio National Guard stepped into the void and ensured that Ohio's foodbanks continued to operate. She testified that these Guardsmen and women rose to the occasion and served with distinction.

Ranking Member Miller thanked the witness for her testimony and commended the Ohio National Guard on its ability to pivot so quickly from and established mission to a new mission and to do so well. He asked what struck the witness as the most important lesson learned through the experience of operating foodbanks through the COVID-19 crisis.

Ms. Hamler-Fuggitt responded that she would like to note that the Ohio National Guard not only

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served in foodbanks but also in providing of emergency healthcare as well as in vaccine distribution. She stated that she was most struck by the decision of Governor DeWine to deploy the National Guard to assist food banks as quickly as he did and the private-public partnership that took place.

Ms. Hamler-Fuggitt concluded her testimony.

Chairman Ghanbari invited Julie Chase-Morefield to provide proponent testimony on HR75.

Ms. Chase-Morefield detailed the challenges that COVID-19 poses to foodbanks of north central Ohio and the variety of roles which Ohio National Guard service members filled to ensure that food distribution continued.

With no further questions and no other witnesses the second hearing of HR75 was concluded.

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved without objection.

Taking a point of personal privilege, Chairman Ghanbari pleaded with committee members and those in attendance to check in on the mental state of veterans in their lives. He shared the phone number for the Veterans Crisis Help Line. The number is 1-800-273-8255.

With no further business the committee adjourned.

Haraz N. Ghanbari, Chair

Committee Secretary

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