

**The Senate General Government Budget Committee  
Proponent Testimony for State Standing Budget Appropriations  
for the Disabled American Veterans, Department of Ohio  
April 20, 2021**

Committee Chair Schaffer, Ranking Minority Member Craig, Committee Members:

My name is Mike Stith. I serve as Adjutant of the Disabled American Veterans, the "DAV," Department of Ohio. We are one of the smaller Veterans Service Organizations but one of the most active.

The DAV's mission is to help build better lives for our nation's disabled veterans and for their widows and orphans. We have assisted armed forces veterans for the last one hundred years.

The DAV Department of Ohio is essential to that mission. Through our State office, located on Chestnut Street here in Columbus, we coordinate various activities and services and provide those services to all veterans, regardless of whether they are members of our organization. Feel free to stop by anytime. We are open and glad to explain our operations.

Veterans and their families know the DAV because we assist them with service-connected disability claims before the US Department of Veterans Affairs. In calendar year 2020, the DAV Cleveland Regional Office served as representative in veterans' claims that obtained or retained \$699,332,451 in retroactive and first year service-connected disability compensation, Dependent Indemnity Compensation and non-service-connected veterans' Pension and Survivor Pension claims. Our Regional Office also assisted veterans during VA reviews of their existing service-connected disability claims so as to retain benefits. In 2020, we assisted veterans in obtaining \$21,871,116 in educational benefits and \$1,285,582 in clothing allowances. These figures are as provided by the US Department of Veterans Affairs, not by us. These claims generate and retain federal government benefits that are provided to and spent by Ohio veterans, to the betterment of the State's economy.

We provide these services through meetings at which Chapter Service Officers (CSOs) provide assistance. Also, at seven of Ohio's VA medical facilities, DAV Department Service Officers (DSOs) assist veterans with preparation and submission of service-connected disability claims and other benefit applications. The vast majority of our claims work is done by the DAV Cleveland Regional Office, with all CSO & DSO claims sent to that office for review and subsequent filing with the VA. Our Department Service Officers' wages are paid with funds from the State.

Many of you know us or know of us from seeing our vans on Ohio's roads and highways. Those vans transport veterans to Veterans Administration (VA) hospitals and clinics, at no cost to them, for medical care.

New hospital vans that we purchased and placed into service in Ohio in early 2020 included both a twelve-passenger Ford Flex and a seven-passenger Ford Explorer, both for use at the Ohio Veterans Home (OVH, Sandusky). One is for use when many patients travel to Cleveland's Louis Stokes VA Hospital and the other when fewer passengers make that trip. These were two of seven vans purchased last year. Those vans were purchased in part with State appropriated funds.

Last year, as the pandemic gripped our State, Ohio Department of Veterans Services' Director, General Deborah Ashenhurst advised Veterans Service Organizations that twenty percent of appropriated, previously scheduled subsidy disbursements will be "held" due to the State's revenue shortfalls attributable to the pandemic.

We want to do our part. That's why we are here. At the same time, we want you to know that due to those funds being "held," our services suffered. For instance, we purchased only three hospital vans for distribution this year. All the while, distancing requirements reduced the number of veterans who could travel to hospitals by van. The seats are just too close. Due to distancing, more vans were needed but fewer were available. This occurred prominently at the Ohio Veterans Home in Sandusky. Fortunately, as stated above, we provided OVH with two new vans just last year. Those vans were crucial to transportation of veteran patients to Cleveland's Louis Stokes VA Hospital.

In addition to hospital transportation, our hospital volunteers assist patients at every major VA Medical Facility and at the Ohio veterans' homes in Sandusky & Georgetown. Our assistance includes distribution of supplies and niceties purchased with funds from our State appropriation.

These and other of our services are beneficial to Ohio's veterans and to their dependents. In a different sense, our services are beneficial to the State at large, in that VA hospital care, service-connected disability claim compensation and VA benefits leave our veterans with funds to use for other purposes. Reductions in State-appropriated funds can cause equivalent reductions in DAV programs, affecting both armed forces veterans and the State.

Please continue to support a DAV State appropriation, as we continue to support our State's armed forces veterans, to their physical and mental betterment, and to their and the State's financial betterment. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak on this matter. It has been an honor to do so.

Respectfully submitted,

*Michael R. Stith*

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