

**Proponent Written Testimony for the
Ohio Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee**

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Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and the other honorable members of the Ohio Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee. I am YNC Merle J. Pratt, U.S. Navy (Retired), and Legislative Chairman and Past State Commander for the AMVETS Department of Ohio. I would like to thank each of you for the opportunity you have afforded me to provide proponent testimony for Senate Bill 361.

When we raised our right hands and took the oath of enlistment, we wrote a blank check for up to our life to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic. This bill, as well as SB335, will help improve the reasons why a Veteran would want to come to Ohio after leaving their military service. Please help Ohio continue to improve as a Veteran and Military-Friendly State.

During my Navy career, I attended Instructor Training as well as other courses and later taught Basic Navy Topics and those of my rate-related expertise. The military schools and courses are of the highest level. As I advanced to a senior enlisted position as a Yeoman Chief, I was constantly teaching my subordinates about the responsibilities and duties of their jobs. In the Navy, if you do not know something, the saying is "Go ask the Chief." Even as a non-commissioned officer, you are expected to train your subordinates, continue to improve your education and advance to a higher rank. So, when a servicemember leaves the military after their initial enlistment or, especially after retiring with 20 or more years, they have

taught and/or completed various types of training and courses. If this were an option when I left the Navy, I might have taken this career path.

Any school district that decides to hire a Veteran is getting a seasoned person as well as a dedicated and loyal employee who has been trained to report to work on time and ready to fulfill their job duties in the utmost manner. Also, when a Veteran leaves their honorable military service, they have great educational benefits. Most of them will continue to advance their education through their appropriate GI Bill benefits. I used the GI Bill toward my Bachelor of Business Administration degree.

I was watching a news program several weeks ago and one of the topics was about getting more minority teachers, especially men, in the public-school systems, where about 50% of the student population is nonwhite and 80% of the teachers are white. Some 41% of the military identify as members of minority groups. So, it only makes sense to target a group that could help erase this disparity in the classroom. There are about 680,000 Veterans in Ohio. This is another potential group to target as teachers.

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and the other honorable members of the Ohio Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee, I once again thank you for allowing me to provide proponent testimony for Senate Bill 361 and urge you to vote this bill out of committee and send it to the Senate floor for passage. I will entertain any questions any of you might have at this time.