

Testimony of CAPT (Ret) Alan Echt, USPHS
In Support of HB 29

Chairman Hoagland, Vice Chair Dr. Johnson, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Alan Echt. I am a retired U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Officer. I commissioned as a lieutenant in 1990 and retired as a captain in 2020. I served as an Environmental Health Officer. My last assignment was as a senior research industrial hygienist with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (CDC NIOSH), at the Alice Hamilton Laboratory in Senator Thomas' district in Cincinnati. My wife and I live in Mason, in Senator Wilson's district. I strongly support HB 29.

As a retired USPHS officer, I carry a blue United States Uniformed Services identification (ID) card that identifies me as a veteran of the Uniformed Services. Former USPHS officers, who left the service after their tour of duty but before completing at least 20 years of service to reach retirement are not issued a Uniformed Services ID card, although they are still considered veterans. Amending sections 317.24 and 317.241 of the Revised Code to allow a person who was discharged from the USPHS to obtain an Ohio veterans identification card would allow those former USPHS officers to identify themselves as veterans and obtain the rights and privileges entitled to bearers of that card.

According to data provided by USPHS Commissioned Corps Headquarters Operations, Office of the Chief Information Officer, as of January 2021, 357 former USPHS officers listed their home state as Ohio when they left the service. Unfortunately, those are the best data I could obtain on former USPHS officers in Ohio.

The U.S. Coast Guard Pay and Personnel Center, Retiree and Annuitant Services Branch provides personnel and pay support and services to USCG, USCGR, USPHS, and NOAA retirees and annuitants. Their data indicate that there were 110 USPHS retirees living in Ohio (out of 6687 total USPHS retirees) as of January 2021.

Thus, HB 29 would make approximately 467 former and retired USPHS officers eligible for a state veterans ID card. That is likely to cost any one county little to issue those additional cards, but it would be very meaningful to the recipients. More importantly, it is another step in bringing parity among all eight Uniformed Services in the Revised Code.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote yes on this important bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.