



**Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Officers**

Nichole R. Coleman  
President  
E-mail: [NRColeman@co.hancock.oh.us](mailto:NRColeman@co.hancock.oh.us)

1100 E Main Cross Street, Suite 123  
Findlay, OH 45840  
Office: 419-424-7036

.....

23 October 2017

**President Nichole Coleman**  
**Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Officers**  
**President Ted Bruner**  
**Ohio State Association of Veterans Service Commissioners**  
**HB 192**  
**House Armed Services, Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security**

Chairman Johnson, Vice Chair Lanese, Ranking Member Craig, Representative Anielski, Representative Brown, Representative Fedor, Representative Landis, Representative Miller, Representative Perales, Representative Riedel, Representative Vitale, Representative Young and Representative Zeltwanger: My name is Nichole Coleman and I am a seven-year Air Force veteran who served in Desert Storm and I am also the wife of a 10-year Air Force veteran. I am a county veterans service officer and the director of the Hancock County Veterans Service Office and I am the president of the Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Officers. p

Our association along with the Ohio State Association of Veterans Service Commissioners have been gathering data ever since the introduction of HB 192 to find out how the OEF, OIF and Desert Storm veterans are already represented on the Veterans Service Commissions and in the Veterans Service Offices. Our survey shows that 19% (just less than 1 in 5) of the County Veteran Service Commissioners and over 45% of the VSC employees have served in the military since August of 1990. Of those who have served in this Modern Era\* 44% have served in theater.

Modern era veterans are eligible to be members of almost any of the veterans service organizations defined in R.C. 5901.02. They can be members of the American Legion, the AmVets and the VFW. These veterans may also be eligible for the DAV if they are disabled and the Military Order of the Purple Heart if they were awarded this medal. If there is going to be an exception made then we believe it should be managed in the same manner as the Vietnam Veterans and the Korean War Veterans. These two groups of veterans are covered in R.C. 5901.02(E).

While well intentioned, the implementation could bring further separation within the veteran ranks when we are working hard to bring them together and close that gap. If the OEF/OIF veterans are going to be singled out then what about Desert Storm, Kosovo, Panama, Beirut, Lebanon, Grenada and peacetime? Should they also be provided with seats on the commission?

We understand that this legislation also gives the VSC the opportunity to appoint a spouse of an OEF/OIF veteran to the Veterans Service Commission. Military spouse's opinions and experiences are a vital importance in every aspect of the service member's life but it is the role of the Veterans Service Commissioners to represent ALL veterans and their family members just as you as Representatives keep the best interest of ALL of your constituents in mind not just those who you share common interests, lifestyles or stories with in life. These commissioners stay connected by being involved in the veterans' organizations that they represent which also keeps them in contact with spouses. If passed this bill would also bring up many potential complications

Ref: H.B. 192 Testimony from OSACVSO/OSAVSC

when divorces happen. Would the ex-spouse then be removed from the commission? If so, who orders this removal?

It is not clear that there is a need to expand the CVSC to include a military spouse. While we do not know the exact number of CVSC and staff who are the spouses of a veteran. We are confident that significant number of our VSC and their employees are related to and understand what it is like to be a family member of a veteran. In fact 2011 Pew Research Center survey, found that more than three-quarters (77%) of adults ages 50 and older said they had an immediate family member –a spouse, parent, sibling or child – who had served in the military.” As written it appears as though the legislation actually requires the military spouse of an active service member or veteran to be a veteran themselves. (5901.022 states – “Except as described in this section, these members shall meet the qualifications under section 5901.02 of the R.C.” 5901.02 States, “Each member of the commission appointed under this section shall be an honorably discharged or honorably separated veteran.”

The Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Officers and the Ohio State Association of Veterans Service Commissioners are concerned about potential nepotism and ethical issues that could arise from the implementation of HB 192. I would like to provide a few examples to explain our concerns. One potential situation is the County Commissioner who has a niece, grandson or child who they want to be appointed to one of these new seats. A “smooth budget hearing process” could be offered as a trade for adding their friend or family member to the Veterans Service Commission. Another possibility is that a staff member from one of the Veterans Service Offices tries to have someone appointed by the VSC to the commission. This board of individuals manages pay raises and personnel issues of the staff so this is yet another possible ethical violation.

The draft legislation Sec. 5901.022 (C) (1) states “If the appointing judge does not receive any recommendation within sixty days after providing the required notification, or the judge does not wish to appoint a person who submitted a request, the judge may appoint any otherwise qualified veteran to serve on an interim basis until the veteran who meets the requirements of this section becomes available and is appointed to serve the remainder of the term.”

Additional questions and concerns that we have:

- The Judge has no requirement to repost the position.
- If the Judge wants to appoint a veteran who does not meet the OEF/OIF requirements, the judge simply has to decline all applicants and pick whomever he/she wants.
- How long is an interim basis?
- What are the training requirements for interim commissioners?
- Should the counties pay to train them if the term may be short in nature?
- What happens in the counties with a population of more than 100,000 that the Judge fails to select a candidate? No provision for an interim commissioner? This could create a situation where the board has an even number of commissioners.

We are opposed to the legislation as written. However, we would welcome the opportunity to work with the sponsors to develop amendments to the bill with the intention of resolving the concerns in the bill.

As responsible stewards of tax payers’ dollars we see this legislation as an unnecessary expenditure. If all 88 counties were to add two additional VSC that would be an additional 176 commissioners. This will create additional pay, travel, training and administrative costs.

Ref: H.B. 192 Testimony from OSACVSO/OSAVSC

We appreciate the time and interest each of you have shown in ensuring our veterans are properly served, just as they have served our Nation.

Notes:

- *My definition of 'modern era' is serving since August of 1990*
- *88 Counties X 5 CVSC = 440 Total CVSC*
- *83 of the 440 CVSC served in the military after August 1990.  $83/440 = 19\%$*
- *242 of the 537 members of the staff served in the military after August 1990.  $242/537 = 45\%$*
- *Total number serving in the modern era 83 CVSC + 242 Staff = 325.*
- *Total Number serving in theater during Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom, or who served subsequently in those theaters of operation 44 CVSC + 100 Staff = 144*
- *Of those who served in the modern era ( $144/325 = 44\%$ ) 44% have served in theater*