**Ohio S.B. 190**

Chairman Uecker, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Local Government, Public Safety & Veteran Affairs Committee, I would like to first thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak as a proponent of S.B. 190. I would also like to thank Senator Hoagland’s office for inviting me here today.

My name is Will Thompson and I am the current Commander for the Department of Ohio Military Order of the Purple Heart. I am a combat wounded, medically retired veteran of the Army and Ohio Army National Guard with 16 years of service. After my release from Walter Reed Army Medical Center and release from active duty I was rated my total and permanent disability from the VA and was also granted disability from the Social Security Administration from the injuries I sustained while in the military. To this day, I continue my physical and mental therapy, but it took me 7 years before I knew that I could re-enter the workforce. I felt I was ready to continue my service and become a contributing member to society again. I would like to state that I am not alone in that thought. I know many veterans who feel this way and who want to re-enter the workforce and continue their service to their community. However, with that, there is major anxiety felt by myself and other veterans when we first start that process of re-entering the workplace. That is when I felt the need to draft the proposal that led to Senator Hoagland sponsoring this bill.

The anxiety felt is that of how do we properly manage our physical and mental health while maintaining a career? I and the veterans I regularly interact with have ongoing appointments with the VA for our service connected disabilities. Because of those appointments there is anxiety of how we will balance work, with our needs, and unfortunately, sometimes the decision is made not to look for work.

Many veterans are too discouraged to look for employment because of the stigma in the community that veterans cannot be productive employees due to having regular V.A. appointments and taking time away from the employer. That is simply not true. The reality is that with a proper balance of continued care the veteran can be a great productive employee.