

Lucas P. Crumley, Veteran, United States Marine Corps

Proponent Testimony, HB 69

Chairman Loychik, Vice Chair Demetriou, and Ranking Member Miller, thank you for the opportunity to join you today and offer proponent testimony on House Bill 69, which aims to modernize the composition of county veterans service commissions across the state. I'm here today to seek your support of this bill and encourage swift action on this legislation.

It's a pleasure to join all of you today as you consider this important step forward in our state's efforts to meet the moment and serve our friends and neighbors who have worn the nation's uniform through our most recent conflicts. Each of these individuals faced unique challenges stemming from a type of warfare never before seen by previous American warfighters. Not only did we develop new ways to fight, but our conflict literally bridged generations - where the children of our warriors would later return to the same battle-spaces as we endured lengthy nation-building efforts on multiple fronts.

From 2007 to 2011, I was proud to stand among the ranks of those patriots. Serving as a Commissioned Officer in the United States Marine Corps, I had a front row seat to witness the character of this generation of veterans while it was tested time and again. After my time in uniform, I went on to work for two members of Congress providing direct relief to veterans of all ages – and their families – as part of our constituent services team. It was in this role that I came to know the diverse challenges that face our county veterans service commissions as they also evolved to meet shifting needs. It's also where I saw my brothers and sisters-in-arms face unnecessary challenges.

At that intersection of people and process, one simple truth became clearer to me than ever: representation matters.

Veterans service commissions operate on tight budgets and can face broad mission sets - driven by diverse local challenges. But those budgets are how we set priorities - as you all know all too well. Unfortunately, without a seat at the table, my contemporaries don't have the opportunity to affect meaningful change by informing those priorities. House Bill 69 aims to address this by calling for conflict-specific representation at the county service commission level. This builds on similar precedents that existed to serve the interest of veterans from both the first and second World War. This is a measured, rational approach to ensure our county commissions are poised to steward public dollars and meet the real need of the moment. From my vantage point, that makes this effort a good government initiative as well.

I'm not here today representing any veterans service organizations. I don't presume to speak on behalf of all my brothers and sisters. But I do know each of them deserves the finest programming, and highest quality of service we can provide at the county level. As we work with veterans service organizations to help them navigate the maze of national veterans benefits and address critical issues like mental health and housing security, we need those with similar experiences at the table, crafting our local strategies. Because representation matters.

That's why I'm proud to stand before you today and ask for your support on this bill. This time-tested, responsible approach is one meaningful step forward at the right moment. As the Post-9/11 generation continues to age, progress through their careers, and raise their families, we can take action now to ensure they aren't met with an outdated system, unresponsive to their reality.

As you continue to consider this legislation, I ask you to do right by them and by the local taxpayers who support this important work. To ensure we provide the right services to our local patriots, while protecting the public trust, please vote in favor of House Bill 69. With that, I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.