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Proponent Testimony for HB 69

Chairman Loychik, Vice-Chair Demetriou, Ranking Member Miller, thank-you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony in favor of House Bill 69. By requiring that county veteran service commissions include at least one post-9/11 veteran, House Bill 69 will provide Ohio's fastest-growing generation of veterans a meaningful role in determining how more than \$90 million of government aid to veterans is distributed across the veteran population.

I am proud to be a post-9/11 veteran through my five years of service in the Ohio Army National Guard. As a medic in the Army, I did most of my active-duty service throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Many members were called to do their jobs and even learn new jobs to adapt to the changing demands of the pandemic. Medics were called to serve in nursing homes and prisons; transportation personnel were called to be bus drivers and couriers; and infantrymen adapted to provide aid and support at local foodbanks. These missions are much different than the roles that the military trained us to play. My service looks much different than that of our post-9/11 combat veterans who served in OIF, OEF, OIR, OFS, and other operations involving the United States Military. This growing generation of veterans has a vast range of experiences and needs that can best be met by people who have served in this same era. Veterans need and deserve strong advocates fighting on their behalf to deliver top-tier resources and benefits. While there may be prescribed training towards the end of a service member's time in the military, it truly is like drinking through a fire hose. Post-9/11 veterans need someone who has had very similar experiences to them to sit on the commission so that these veterans can be best served by their local Veteran Service Commission. As time goes on, the experiences and needs of each era of

veterans change based on their military service and the resources available to them at the time. House Bill 69 provides an opportunity for the legislature to ensure that the growing number of post-9/11 veterans have someone representing their specific needs on their local Veteran Service Commission.

As mentioned previously, counties across Ohio appropriate over \$90 million each year for local 5-member Veteran Service Commissions to distribute. Each commission has significant discretion as to how benefits for local veterans will be disbursed, and how the respective offices will be run. With great power comes great responsibility to ensure we distribute these funds in a manner that will be most beneficial to all generations of veterans. It is notable that each year we see millions of dollars going unspent in these VSC county budgets. In 2021, one large metro county, for example, was allotted \$7.5 million, but disbursed \$3.5 million. In 2021, the total amount of unspent appropriations, averaged across all counties, added up to \$751,897 returned to the County General Revenue Fund from each Commission.

I believe HB 69 will ensure that more of these funds are distributed to veterans seeking assistance and help our most vulnerable veterans deal with their modern-day issues. Thank you for letting me come in and testify in favor of HB 69, and I will now answer questions any Representative may have.