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Proponent Testimony H.B. 69

Chairman Loychik, Vice-Chair Demetriou, and Ranking Member Miller thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony in favor of House Bill 69. This bill will require each county Veterans' Service Commission to include as a member at least one Veteran who served in the military after September 11, 2001.

In my former life, I was a United States Army Paratrooper who served in America's Guard of Honor. The Mighty 82nd Airborne Division's 4th Brigade, 2nd Battalion of the 508 Parachute Infantry Regiment Alpha Company 1st Platoon Punishers as a Forward Observer and Team Leader. In January 2007, I deployed to Afghanistan for 15 months for Operation Enduring Freedom's 7th & 8th rotations. I separated from the Army shortly after returning in 2008 as a Sergeant.

I read in the joint-sponsor testimony that some will claim that the lack of Global War on Terrorism era Veterans' involvement with Veteran services is somehow just a function of age, that we are too young to have an interest. That person said that they respectfully disagreed. I adamantly disagree with this excuse and am tired of hearing it because it is simply not true. Since starting my professional Veteran advocacy journey in 2015, I have been met with an abundance of gatekeeping by older Veterans who hold positions such as Veteran Service Commissioners.

The Department of Veteran Affairs is projecting that the number of living World War 2 Veterans will decline rapidly in the coming years until 2036 when just a few hundred Americans who served in World War 2 will still be alive.

Nearly two-thirds of Student Veterans today are first-generation college students such as myself a Ph.D. Student at the Ohio State University studying Justice-Involved Veterans and Veterans Treatment Courts. This stat indicates that Post-9/11 veterans are the most educated generation of American Veterans. This is not a knock on other older Veterans; this is us paying homage to the fruits of their labor in being the ones that provided us with life-changing post-service opportunities. Now we want to be able to put our education to work in service to the Veteran community just like them.

The point of these two stats is that this legislation is a decade overdue. Post-9/11 Veterans should have been embraced and groomed for this kind of position without using legislation such as H.B. 69 to force the hand. Post-9/11 Veterans are sponges eager to soak up the decades of knowledge that can be bestowed on us. I get it change is hard, but change is an evolutionary necessity. Every generation of American Warfighters knows what their unique needs are, and we need to be put in a position to be of service to assist while simultaneously carrying the load in honor of our predecessors who are dedicated to serving the Veteran community. And doing so alongside them.