



OHIO STATE ASSOCIATION OF VETERANS SERVICE COMMISSIONERS

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December 04, 2023

Ohio House of Representatives, House Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committee

Opposition to proposed House Bill 69

Chair Loychik, Vice-Chair Demetriou, Ranking Member Miller, and Members of the House Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committee I bid good day.

My name is Jared Smith, former decorated Staff Sergeant of the United States Army Reserves with two tours to Iraq resulting in 24 months of service, and a third tour to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba of the Joint Task Force. Awards earned include the Combat Action Badge, the Army Commendation Medal with combat distinguishing Valor device, 3 additional Army Commendation Medals, the Iraqi Campaign Medal with 3 campaign stars, the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, the Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal, and a member of the class of 2010 Ohio Military Hall of Fame for Valor.

In other words, I am a Post 9/11 Veteran. In addition to being a Post 9/11 Veteran, I am also a Past President of the Ohio State Association of the Veterans Service Commissioners. In fact of our last four Past Presidents of the Ohio State Association of Veterans Service Commissioners, three of four are Post 9/11 Veterans, and of our current officer line of President, 1st Vice President, and 2nd Vice President, two of three are Post 9/11 Veterans.

The written joint-sponsor testimony of State Representative Stewart and State Representative Willis states, "that the process for determining which veterans are appointed to oversee millions of dollars of government benefits to the veteran community has not been meaningfully revised in more than 25 years".

The joint sponsors testimony talks about needing progress stating, "prior to 1994, the Ohio Revised Code specifically required that one slot on the Veteran Service Commission be filled by a WWI veteran, and that one slot would be filled by a WWII veteran."

The joint sponsors believe that going back in time is somehow progress. By putting one generation of Veterans over another generation is progress. How is this not once again spitting in the face of the generations of Veterans who paved our very way.

Currently, Ohio's County Veterans Service Commissioners are filled from the counties American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, AMVETS, and the last seat being of either the Military Order of the Purple Hearts, the Vietnam Veterans of America, or the Korean War Veterans Association. If any such organization has no post or chapter located in the county, the appointment shall be made from lists of recommended persons submitted by posts or chapters of any other congressionally chartered veterans organizations located in the county. If no such other organizations have posts or chapters located in the county, the judge responsible for making appointments under this section may appoint any qualified veteran to represent the veteran community. These rotate annually on a five-year basis.

When it is a Veterans organizations turn in the rotation, notification is sent from the County Common Pleas Judge(s) to each one of the Posts or Chapters in that County. A list of three individuals is to be submitted from the Posts/Chapters to the Judge(s) for their review and to interview and decide who is best suited for the role of Veterans Service Commissioner in their perspective county. In each and every year, Post 9/11 Veterans are currently eligible to serve as ORC 5901.02 is written so that the appointment is borne from a Congressionally Chartered Veterans organization. I was just 32 years old when I became a Veterans Service Commissioner, I was 34 years old as a 2nd Vice President of the OSAVSC and 36 years old when I became the President of the Ohio State Association of Veterans Service Commissioners leading us through the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Our current process is completely valid and moreover allows those who are active in Veterans advocacy regardless of age or era served as the basis of their recommendations. Should issues arise or concerns of a Veterans Service Commissioner, the appointing authority from the County Common Pleas Judges has the right to remove with cause. In the amended version of House Bill 69, removal for cause becomes confusing rather than the currently and clearly stated ORC 5901.

Allowing legislation based on generation served leaves out the opportunity to find the best overall suited candidate for our Veterans Service Commissions, creating entitlement for one generation over another is something every Vietnam Veteran has vowed against, meaning, "never again will one generation of veterans abandon another." Yet here we are, speaking of proposed legislation that turns their back on the Vietnam Veteran and other conflicts should no other Post 9/11 Veteran be on the Board of a Veterans Service Commission and they are the one that is best suited. This legislation focuses on what attrition already does for us naturally.

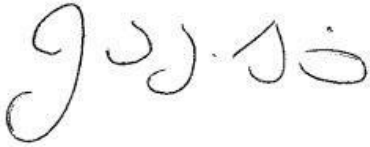
In addition, this legislation is seeking entitlement saying Veterans Service Commissions do not have the voice of Post 9/11 Veterans and they are out of touch. This is a complete misconception and is fully misleading. Predominantly, the employees of the County Veterans Service Commissions are Post 9/11 employees in full time positions with sustaining wages while that of a Veterans Service Commissioner stipend is typically a few hundred dollars a month.

Chairman Loychik, Vice-Chair Demetriou, Ranking Member Miller, thank-you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony of House Bill 69.

The framework of this legislation is that a Post 9/11 Veteran is incapable to become a Veterans Service Commissioner without entitlement, this context undermines and uncharacterizes my Brothers, Sisters, and my Service, both of the Post 9/11 Veteran and all those generations who paved our way. Being a Veterans Service

Commissioner is so much more than an honor, it also comes with responsibilities up to and including saving the life of one of our Brothers and Sisters in Arms by the programs and assistance provided at our Veterans Service Commissions. This position is not a resume builder, it is one to strive to achieve, and once there to not rest on your laurels but to find the next gear in serving our Brothers and Sisters in Arms, their widow(er)s, children, and orphans.

Yours in Service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J.F. Smith', written in a cursive style.

Jared F. Smith

OSAVSC Past President 2019-2020

Veterans of Foreign Wars Life member

American Legion Life Member

AMVETS Life Member

Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Life Member

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