



American Legion  
**MEL BAHER**  
COMMISSIONER



American Veterans  
**FRANK POCCHI**  
COMMISSIONER



Disabled American Veterans  
**VACANT**  
COMMISSIONER



Veterans of Foreign Wars  
**JAMES RILEY**  
COMMISSIONER



Vietnam Veterans of America  
**BOB POTTS**  
COMMISSIONER

**JON REISS**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**FERONNE WILLIAMS**  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

## Cuyahoga County Veterans Service Commission

Ph: 216.698.2600 • Fax: 216.698.2650

Email: [vsccmail@cuyahogacounty.us](mailto:vsccmail@cuyahogacounty.us)

1849 Prospect Avenue • Suite 150 • Cleveland, OH 44115

**Jon Reiss, Executive Director**

**Cuyahoga County Veteran Service Commission AND Post-9/11 Veteran**

**House Bill 69**

**House Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committee**

Honorable Mike Loychik, Chair

House Armed Services and  
Veterans Affairs Committee  
Ohio House of Representatives

Honorable Steve Demettriou, Vice Chair

House Armed Services and  
Veterans Affairs Committee  
Ohio House of Representatives

Honorable Adam Miller, Ranking Member

House Armed Services and  
Veterans Affairs Committee  
Ohio House of Representatives

Re: Opponent Testimony

Chairman Loychik, Vice-Chair Demettriou, Ranking Member Miller, thank-you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in opposition to House Bill 69, which will require each county Veterans service commission to include one member who served after September 11, 2001.

A quick background on myself, as I believe it helps define my unique perspective on this issue. I am 41 years old, I enlisted in the United States Army Reserves in 1999 while still a 17-year-old high school junior. I served on active duty from 2004 until 2009 as an Army Signal Corps Officer. Following my military transition, I worked with homeless Veterans and in 2013 I was honored with the role as Executive Director for the Cuyahoga County Veterans Service Commission. Cuyahoga County VSC is Ohio's largest VSC by Veteran population, staffing, and clients served. In 2013, at 31 years old, I was the youngest Executive Director in the state. In 2023, after nearly a decade in service, I am still one of the youngest to hold this position. I am a post-9/11 Veteran, a Veteran Advocate and have committed my entire adult life (since I was 17) to public service.

There is no denying that the post 9/11 era represents an ever-increasing percentage of our population. As it currently stands, approximately 15% of Veterans in Ohio served during this era. The importance of representing the needs of all Veterans and specific Veterans' groups should not be marginalized.

I do not believe that the structure of this legislation accurately achieves its perceived goal without creating other additional challenges.

First and foremost, Vietnam Veterans represent the largest percentage of Veterans nationwide and here in Ohio. This legislation, as written, all but eliminates the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) from representation on a Veterans Service Commission. The requirement that at least one recommendation from VVA is a post 9/11 Veteran is nearly impossible as it would require a Veteran that enlisted in 1975 was still serving over 26 years later in 2001. While there are some Veterans that fit this role, they are few and far between (<1900 in Ohio). This is a challenge not only faced by VVA, but other Veterans Service Organizations as well. Amvets and other organizations will be challenged to find a willing and available post 9/11 Veteran to recommend. Additionally, by requiring commissions to comply with this legislation by January 15, 2024, it is the VVA seat that must be filled.

Per the current and proposed legislation, a Veteran must be recommended by specific Veterans Service Organizations (The Disabled American Veterans - DAV, American Legion - AL, Amvets, and Veterans of Foreign Wars – VFW, Military Order of Purple Heart – MOPH, Korean War Veterans – KWV, or VVA). Each year, these organizations recommend individuals from their membership. If a post-9/11 Veteran were an active member, that represented the needs of that organization, they could already be recommended for appointment. The reason they are not being recommended at high volume is because there aren't nearly as many active Post 9/11 Veterans as we all would like. This legislation does not fix that problem.

One proponent suggested that opponents do not want change. The organizations above have actively recruited and encouraged the involvement of younger generations of Veterans. The truth is that many simply are not engaging. I have a hard time understanding how a post 9/11 Veteran cannot or will not become an active Veteran at a VFW/AL/DAV/Amvets, but will somehow become an active Commissioner for a Veterans Service Commission.

Much of the proponent testimony emphasized the need for representation and lack of access. This could not be further from the truth. The VFW, DAV, AL, Amvets and MOPH have no restrictions that would impact post 9/11 Veterans. These organizations actively encourage and recruit younger membership. A Veteran that served in Iraq or Afghanistan can join any of these organizations and become a representative of a Veterans Service Commission right now.

Additionally, proponent testimony highlighted the evolving needs of Veterans. The VFW, AL, DAV, Amvets, and VVA are among the most influential Veterans Service Organizations in the entire country. Their membership and leadership are responsible for nearly every positive legislation in support of Veterans for the past century. Their advocacy has led to reforms in the Department of Veterans Affairs, modernized health care, modernized GI Bill, and most recently the PACT ACT. Despite the average age of membership, these groups have continued to evolve and ensure that the needs of all Veterans in all eras are accounted for.

The 2 largest Veterans' populations in the state are Vietnam Veterans, and Gulf War era (pre 9/11 only) at 241,417 and 99,007 respectively. Post 9/11 Veterans are the focus of this legislation, despite representing less population than the generation of Veterans that served from 1975 to 2001. The prioritization of this group over others is inconsistent with brotherhood and camaraderie that defines the Armed Services.

In summary, this well-intended legislation simply misses the mark. It strives to achieve 20% membership on Commissions when the state representation is already 18%. It strives to create a pathway that already exists with 5 of the 7 recommending Veterans Service Organizations. And it does so by eliminating any membership for Korean War Vets and all but eliminating membership from the only Veterans Service Organization with dedicated membership to our largest Veterans Base (Vietnam Veterans). I strongly encourage the committee to oppose this legislation.

I am happy to address any questions you may have.