

Chairman Loychik, Vice Chair Demetriou, and Ranking Member Miller, thank you for the opportunity to join you today and offer opponent testimony on House Bill 69 which aims to change the ***selection procedure*** for County Veterans Service Commissions across the state. I am here today to seek your opposition to this bill and encourage swift action to defeat it.

My name is Michael Newman. I am the treasurer of Buckeye State Council, Vietnam Veterans of America. Buckeye State Council represents the 3600 members of Vietnam Veterans of America in Ohio. We are opposed to HB 69 as an ill-conceived bill which, among other things, negatively affects Vietnam Veterans of America by way of Merton's theory of unintended consequences.

The fact that the Ohio Revised Code has survived without any major changes for nearly three decades is testament to its carefully thought out and planned approach for the placement of county Veterans Service Commissioners.

The testimony of its co-sponsors suggests that younger veterans are under-represented on some county Veterans Service Commissions, and HB 69 is their attempt to level the playing field. To accomplish this, HB 69 makes seemingly innocuous changes in how Veterans Service Commissioners are selected. But HB 69 is not very well thought out. Reduced to its very basics, it mandates the selection of a post-911 veteran as a Veterans Service Commissioner, which guarantees younger representation on the commission.

I agree that September 11, 2001 was an emotional date for Americans, but for the purposes of this bill, it is an arbitrary date which merely places veterans into a specific age group. The fact that Post-911 veterans are, by definition, generally younger than other veterans is an unsatisfactory reason. There will always be somebody younger. Furthermore, the Post-911 era is an open-ended era, currently standing at 22 years and counting. Without another update to the Ohio Revised Code, the term Post-911 veterans will eventually apply to **all** veterans. Then at what point does the "mandatory" requirement get removed from "Post-911" era veterans and applied to some even younger era veterans?

But let's look at the real problem of imposing this mandate. Selecting Veterans Service Commissioners mandated by Post-911 service is nothing more than age discrimination. What can we expect next? Are there not enough women on the Veterans Service Commission? Not enough Hispanics? Discrimination based on age is no different than basing it on sex, race, religion or ethnicity. It is an artificial device, and it is wrong.

To make matters worse, HB 69 applies this mandate to the one particular year of the five-year selection cycle that includes Vietnam Veterans of America. I question why the author of HB 69 would select that particular year of the cycle.

While placing a Post-911 mandate on any other year group would adversely affect that organization by eliminating any other candidate regardless of qualifications, the placement applied by HB 69 would essentially eliminate Vietnam Veterans of America from recommending **any** of its members.

Because of its membership requirements, the youngest member of Vietnam Veterans of America would have been forty-six on 9/11/2001 and unlikely to have served on active duty after that date. HB 69 will effectively prevent Vietnam Veterans of America from recommending any of its members, hence its passage will effectively remove Vietnam Veterans of America from its role in the Ohio Revised Code without even having to name the organization.

Since its inception in 1978, Vietnam Veterans of America has been instrumental in providing assistance to veterans of all eras through its powerful congressional lobbying as well as its legal challenges of the Veterans Administration's interpretation of the laws passed by the United States Congress. The VVA's founding principle, "Never again shall one generation of veterans abandon another," still rings true to this day and confirms Buckeye State Council's concern and support for all of Ohio's 686,000 veterans.

And while Vietnam Veterans of America may find itself approaching the limits of its existence, to paraphrase the words of Mark Twain, the reports of our death have been greatly exaggerated.

Passage of HB 69 would surreptitiously eliminate the Vietnam Veterans of America organization as a source for selection of any of its members as a Veterans Service Commissioner, and I would ask each of the committee members to reflect, "Is this really my intent?"

I must admit that when I retired from the navy in 1975, I wanted nothing to do with veterans' organizations. Nearly 40 years later I was introduced to Vietnam Veterans of America. I became involved, and soon after joining in 2013, was elected as a Chapter 649 delegate, then to its Board of Directors. I moved from there to 2nd Vice President, then served three years as President of the chapter – the largest chapter in the state of Ohio. I am currently its 1st Vice President. In 2022 I was elected Treasurer of our state organization, the Buckeye State Council of Vietnam Veterans of America.

During this short ten year period I was the originator of various chapter projects – an annual fundraising raffle, scholarships for children and grandchildren of Clermont County veterans, and most recently, sales of personal veterans banners. I managed the chapter's Memorial Brick sales, contributed articles for the chapter newsletter and even now continue to oversee its printing and distribution to our 250 chapter members. I have donated money and time working with our annual Golf Tournament, participating in our chapter's volunteer activities at the Cincinnati VA Hospital, as well as at our Veterans' Home in Georgetown. I have spoken with local veterans at our meet and greet sessions, directing them to our local Veterans Service Office when they need assistance, especially for filing a claim with the Veterans Administration.

In noting the above, I am not trying to be boastful, but I relate this information only because I want to think that if it was ever my intention to become a Veterans Service Commissioner, that our chapter might make that recommendation for me based on my accomplishments for our

organization in addition to other qualifications. This is what I envision as an example of a path to this type of post.

The unintended consequences of the passage of HB 69 to level the playing field will result in restructuring the field into a bottomless pit for Vietnam Veterans of America.

It should be noted that based on the current Ohio Revised Code, there is not one year in which a qualified Post-911 veteran cannot be recommended by one of the current service organizations. And, based on information from several sources, there are indeed, many Post-911 veterans now serving as Veterans Service Commissioners. So, the current system works. I am not against Post-911 veterans, nor am I opposed to them being members of the Veterans Service Commissions in the counties of Ohio. What I would expect to see from the proponents of HB 69 is sound reasoning as to why HB 69 is the way to accomplish that. I do not see that.

I would imagine that as more and more Post-911 veterans become involved with the various service organizations, we would see an increase in their numbers serving as Veterans Service Commissioners. With the existing five year cycle and its current veterans organizations, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that we will soon be seeing the selection of Post-911 veterans for all five Veteran Service Commissioners for any particular county.

Without. Changing. Anything.

Based on the above, I urge you to vote no on House Bill 69.

Thank you.