



Department of Ohio, District 12

Nicolette Bolte, Commander

Robert Leach, Quartermaster

TO: Honorable Mike Loychik, Chair, House Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committee
Honorable Steve Demetriou, Vice Chair, House Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committee
Honorable Adam C. Miller, Ranking Member, House Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committee
FROM: Andrea M. Neutzling, Senior Vice Commander, District 12, Veterans of Foreign Wars Dept. of Ohio
DATE: November 28th, 2023
RE: IN OPPOSITION OF HB 69 (135TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY)

Chairman Loychik, Vice Chairman Demetriou, Ranking Member Miller and other Honorable members of the House Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide opposition testimony on House Bill 69.

My name is Andrea Neutzling, I am the Legislative Chair and Senior Vice Commander for District 12, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of Ohio. I'm here today on behalf of my District which covers House Districts 90, 91, 92, 93 and 94, consisting of Athens, Gallia, Jackson, Lawrence, Meigs, Pike, Ross, Scioto, and Vinton Counties. I am a 100% Service-Connected Veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom. I have been advocating for Veterans at a National level since testifying at a Senate Field Hearing on Appalachian Veterans held by Senator Brown in 2010 to helping get the PACT Act passed just last year. At a state level I have gotten more involved this year.

House Bill 69 wants to make that 1 members of the County Veterans Commissioners Board is Post 9/11. I've read the proponents testimonies from other Post 9/11 veterans along with the testimonies of the primary sponsors.

The vast majority of the testimonies from the Proponent's side all talk about restoring this to a Conflict Specific appointment, which is how it was prior to 1994. It made sense why Conflict Specific appointments were removed. World War I veterans were almost gone, census in 1990 shows 67,000 still alive in the entire United States. Ohio has an estimated 729,645 veterans living here, of those the estimates are 2.01% WWII/Era, 5.8% Korean War/Era, 33.09% Vietnam War/Vietnam 33.32% Gulf War Era, which by VA categorize it as anyone serving after August 2nd, 1990 thru the present, and 25.7% between conflicts, aka Peacetime. Currently the policy makes it so any member of a Congressionally chartered Veterans Organizations located in the County or a lack of those in the County then the Judge may appoint ANY qualified veteran to represent the Veteran Community.

How does serving after 9/11 make us any better than those in Vietnam, Korea, WWII, the Gulf War or even peacetime? It doesn't. We all have faced or are facing the same problems no matter when we served, though Vietnam era veterans have historically faced harder times than any other era. Until the PACT Act some Vietnam era veterans couldn't even get their health issues service connected at the VA because while they were in the Area of Operations, they weren't boots on ground in Vietnam. Peacetime veterans can't help when they served that no wars or "Police Actions" were declared, they put on the uniform like the rest of us and were ready to go if they were told to go to combat.

There is already enough divide within the veteran's community. If a person is a combat veteran if they never left their base during a deployment. If they are a Veteran if they only served in the National Guard or Reserves and never got deployed. Until recently the older generation of Female veterans never really considered themselves Veterans, and when they were getting out were told they couldn't get any assistance from the VA, even though Congress had passed a law saying they could in 1948. I get told that my deployment was a cake walk, because I did Detainee Operations, by other veterans. I have learned to just ignore them, because my telling them that "oh yes, it was such a cake walk, dealing with detainees who have nothing better to do than try to think of ways to mess with service members, like throwing molotov cocktails at us, to worrying about if I'm going to be raped by one of my fellow service members or even one of the Iraqi Correction Officer Trainees that we had on the base, and being a deployed mom of 2 kids under the age of 3 years old, just made my year long deployment so easy, but like them I signed up to do my job. I'm a proud 7th Generation veteran, 6th generation Combat veteran in my family to include 2 Gold Stars, one from WWII and one from Vietnam.

In conclusion, I strongly urge the House Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committee to either kill this bill or make amendments to the requirements of who serves on the board not by conflict specific but by gender/ethnicity/race where available. Thank you and I am open to any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

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