

THE AMERICAN LEGION
DEPARTMENT OF



DEPARTMENT HEADQUARTERS: 60 BIG RUN ROAD, DELAWARE, OHIO 43015-8007
PHONE: 740-362-7478 | FAX: 740-362-1429 | EMAIL: LEGION@OHIOLEGION.COM

Scott Palider, Legislative Coordinator

American Legion Department of Ohio

Interested Party Testimony House Bill 33

March 21st, 2023

Chairman Patton, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the House Subcommittee on Transportation, I am Scott Palider, Legislative Coordinator for The American Legion Department of Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 33 today.

The American Legion Department of Ohio is a leading veterans-service organization within the state of Ohio, with a membership of over 80,000 wartime veterans. The American Legion Department of Ohio and several other veteran service organizations receive an appropriation from the State of Ohio for providing a state service to all Ohio veterans, a responsibility assumed by many state governments, but abdicated in Ohio to our veterans organizations.

We welcome this responsibility, and have since at least the 105th General Assembly, shared in the cost of providing such services to Ohio's veterans, and we have a willingness to continue. Ohio's veterans benefit from this arrangement in many ways. We have a network of Posts and Post Service Officers throughout the state, volunteers trained to identify potential VA beneficiaries, who direct them to nearby claims filing

“Veterans Strengthening America”

THE AMERICAN LEGION
DEPARTMENT OF



DEPARTMENT HEADQUARTERS: 60 BIG RUN ROAD, DELAWARE, OHIO 43015-8007
PHONE: 740-362-7478 | FAX: 740-362-1429 | EMAIL: LEGION@OHIOLEGION.COM

professionals at our offices or those of County Veterans Service Officers, who forward claims to our offices at the Cleveland VA Regional Office (VARO). Our Department and/or National Service Officers, trained advocates who review the claims, submit them to VA, obtain receipts for submissions, provide receipts to CVSOs, represent claimants in formal and informal hearings, file legal briefs in support of claims, file appeals as necessary, and submit arguments citing case law to the Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA), and our National representatives in Washington or Ohio representatives make final arguments before the BVA in Cleveland by video conference or before Traveling Boards. Cases decided by BVA must be court ready, as the next step in the process, if necessary, is the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims.

Our team of highly trained Department Service Officers (DSOs) located in and around the 5 major VA Medical Centers here in Ohio continually provide for our states veterans even as their workloads and operating costs expand. Over the last two years our team of DSOs has fluctuated from only 4 DSOs up to our current 8 DSOs plus 1 support position to help balance the increased claims work. Even though our DSO's come and go one thing remains true for all of them, they are all honorably discharged Veterans who proudly served this country and continue to serve those who served.

“Veterans Strengthening America”

THE AMERICAN LEGION
DEPARTMENT OF



DEPARTMENT HEADQUARTERS: 60 BIG RUN ROAD, DELAWARE, OHIO 43015-8007
PHONE: 740-362-7478 | FAX: 740-362-1429 | EMAIL: LEGION@OHIOLEGION.COM

Our DSO staffing numbers have fluctuated due to multiple economic factors, this includes inflation placing a burdensome cost on our operating costs to trying to keep wages as close to a competitive level as we can as a non-profit organization. Their workload is set to expand even more this year since on January 1, 2023 the Honoring our PACT Act took effect. For those of you on the committee that do not know, the Honoring our PACT Act is the most comprehensive expansion of veteran benefits our country has ever seen, bringing VA eligibility to millions of veterans who are victims of toxic exposure during their military service.

This increase in VA eligibility as of January 1st of this year has led to an increase of 1000 new claims for our DSO's this year alone and I will remind the committee it is only March. It is predicted by the VA that there will be a backlog of over 450,000 claims related to the PACT Act by October of this year. It falls upon the shoulders of our DSOs to assist the county veteran service offices and the veterans of our state when fighting for VA benefits.

Since 2017 our DSOs have successfully won 84% of the claims they have filed with the VA, resulting in winning \$17.2 million for Ohio Veterans. Last year alone their success rate was 92% and they won \$2.29 million for Ohio Veterans. Even when overworked and under compensated our DSOs provide for Ohio's veterans not only because it is the right thing to do but it is the

“Veterans Strengthening America”

THE AMERICAN LEGION
DEPARTMENT OF



DEPARTMENT HEADQUARTERS: 60 BIG RUN ROAD, DELAWARE, OHIO 43015-8007
PHONE: 740-362-7478 | FAX: 740-362-1429 | EMAIL: LEGION@OHIOLEGION.COM

least we can do for those selfless few who have honorably served this country.

I believe the American Legion Department of Ohio's Department Service Officers will be even more successful with the claims they file with the BVA in 2023, but for this to occur they will need the funds approved by the state appropriation. With these funds we will continue the mission of the American Legion which is to enhance the well-being of America's veterans, their families, our military, and our communities by our devotion to mutual helpfulness. That is why I am asking this committee today to recommend an increase to the budget approved for Ohio Veteran Service Organizations. A 10% increase to the money given to the American Legion Department of Ohio Department Service Officers will allow our organization to keep the highly trained team we have assembled over the past year and help Ohio's veterans with VA claims in the long-term and even short-term.

Thank you for your time and please let me know if you have any questions.

Scott Palider
Legislative Coordinator
American Legion Department of Ohio

“Veterans Strengthening America”