

HB 57 - Index the homestead exemption to inflation

Testimony of David K. Root
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Before the House Ways and Means Committee
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Chairman Roemer, Vice Chairman Merrin, Ranking Member Troy, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify in support of House Bill 57. I'd like to talk about the impact a simple act of adjusting the homestead exemption for inflation can be. The impact is bigger than you might imagine.

My name is David Root, and I am State Legislative Chairman for the Department of Ohio VFW. Two weeks ago, I spent three days walking the Halls of Congress talking to our Ohio Congressmen and Senators about the current key issues the VFW would like them to be working on. High on that list was the prevention of veteran suicides. We all know that suicides are tied to mental health, and much is being done nationally and even here in Ohio to study the issue and to reduce the number of suicides among veterans.

What the VFW is advocating is that the VA look into the causes of these mental health issues our veterans are facing. We feel there is more than PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injury causing veteran suicide. As an example, a 2020 study of recently transitioned service members found those with fewer years of education had a higher risk of suicide, with lack of education being a likely factor contributing to difficulty finding post-military employment and potentially leading to financial instability.

But education is only one of the areas VFW wants the VA to be working on. Problems with employment and compensation are two other areas that can push a veteran to feel helpless and give up on everything. The last issue VFW feels is a contributor to veteran suicide is housing. Data from one study of veterans who reported housing instability between 2012 and 2016 indicated over half of these veterans accessed homeless services and associated this use of services to a significant reduction in suicide risk. This is a positive sign for the ability of these programs to perform upstream intervention.

While the VFW national organization is working with our national legislators to look at these things as a way to reduce veteran suicide, we can work together to reduce the risk of suicide here in Ohio. Housing is one of the ways.

The Ohio Housing Finance Agency published their *'Housing Needs Assessment for Fiscal Year 2021'* and it stated -and I quote, "Ohio's oldest veterans face substantial housing cost burden. One-in-five veteran mortgage holders aged 75 and over (20%) were severely cost burdened in 2018". There are also many younger veteran homeowners who are 100% disabled who could also be facing housing cost burden. This is exactly the issue that can drive up the veteran suicide rate in Ohio.

House Bill 57 can be a big part of ending veteran suicides at a very small cost. Much more can be done to curb the financial burden of veterans owning a home in Ohio, but HB 57 is a start. A small adjustment to compensate for the rising cost of living each year can be the difference of living in peace and living on the street for some.

I would like to thank Representatives Hall and Demetriou for sponsoring House Bill 57 and I urge the committee to support the bill and vote for favorable passage. You could be doing something far greater than simply amending the Ohio Revised Code. You could be saving lives.

Thank you again for this opportunity and I will attempt to answer any questions the committee might have.