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Testimony before the House Ways and Means Committee

House Bill 254 - *Regards homestead property tax exemption for disabled veterans*

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Chairman Roemer, Vice Chairman Lorenz, Ranking Member Troy and members of the House Ways and Means Committee, thank you for allowing me to once again stand before you and talk about another homestead exemption bill for Ohio veterans.

I gave proponent testimony for *House Bill 90* in June and now I want to do the same for *House Bill 254*. Why am I in favor of both bills? As a legislative chairman for the Department of Ohio Veterans of Foreign Wars, I serve as a volunteer to advocate not only for our members but all of Ohio's veterans. As such I will be supportive of any bill that will help them and I will oppose any bill that will harm them.

But on the agenda for today is *House Bill 254* so let's look at it.

HB 254 to begin with, deals solely with exemptions for veterans and their surviving spouses. The law currently allows a veteran who is totally disabled to get a tax exemption on \$50,000 of their homesteads value. *HB 254* would increase that to exempt all taxes owed on the homestead.

HB 254 would also create two more levels of exemption for veterans rated at 50% to 90% disabled. A veteran rated at 50, 60, or 70 percent would be tax exempt on \$5,000 of the homesteads value. A veteran would not pay taxes on \$10,000 of the homesteads value if they are rated at 80, or 90 percent disabled.

No other bill considers the veterans who are less than 100% disabled. They have to be totally disabled or they don't get anything and even then it is only on \$50,000 of their homes value.

I have said before that I was not opposed to a discussion about having an income threshold amendment and I'm still not, because I believe that all parties should be willing to come together and have discussions. However in my heart I know that income levels should have no bearing on homestead exemptions.

Think about social security. Let's say Jack is 72 years old and gets \$1,200 each month. But he also has a pretty nice investment portfolio that earns him several thousand dollars a month. Is he penalized because he was a wise investor and his \$1,200 a month social security taken away from him? Of course not, he earned that \$1,200 monthly check and he gets to keeps it.

Do you think that if Jack is also a veteran who was injured while serving his country and has to live with that for the rest of his life doesn't deserve his homestead exemption? Do we penalize him

because he was able to rise above his disability and still earn a good living for himself and his family?

Because a veteran is able to be financially successful while living with a disability is not a reason to penalize them and take away their homestead exemption. That exemption was earned and it should never be taken away for any reason.

I hear quite often from members of the general assembly that we need to pass this bill or that bill so we can make Ohio the most veteran friendly state in the country and I'm all for that. But, when it comes to veterans homestead exemptions we are far from first place. We don't even make the top ten. A quarter of the states are ahead of Ohio. There are at least 13 other states that have some level of exemptions for veterans who are less than 100% disabled. And at least 12 states have total homestead tax exemptions for 100% disabled veterans. House Bill 254 would be a big boost to make Ohio the number one state for veterans.

I respectfully ask that the committee vote in favor of House Bill 254.

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of HB 254. I'll try to answer any questions the committee might have.