Chair Johnson, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Craig, and Veterans and Public Safety Committee members:

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Tim Hauser. I am a Gulf War Veteran. I advocated for the PACT Act alongside Jon Stewart and many outstanding individuals. I am the founder of the Veterans Assurance Network, and I am a suicide survivor. My brother Dennis, a Vietnam and Gulf War veteran, took his own life 24 years ago.

I am strongly in support of Bill 225, which will designate September 22 as Veteran Suicide Awareness and Prevention Day. As you may know, September is National Suicide Awareness and Prevention Month. While Ohio currently has a Veteran Suicide Awareness Day, the first Saturday of May, no one knows about this day. If you Google it, nothing shows up. Veteran suicide is on the rise.

Ohio is ranked the 6th largest state for veteran population, and sadly, Ohio is ranked 3rd for most veteran suicides among the most veteran-populated states. This is nothing to be proud of. This is alarming as Ohio touts itself as having the best veteran benefits of any state. The latest report on suicides in Ohio doesn't even mention veterans. Also, the Ohio Suicide Prevention Program for 2024-2025 only mentions that in 2020, veteran suicide was 2 to 2.5 times greater than the national average. Ohio is always higher in suicides than the national average.

I challenge you to lead the way to show this nation how to combat veteran suicide by passing SB 225 and naming September 22nd Veteran Suicide Awareness and Prevention Day. By doing so, this date will be easier to remember, and organizations such as mine will be able to set up programs and events to educate people on not just the warning signs that their veteran may be suicidal but also the programs and services available to help prevent the veteran from taking their own life.

I ask that you consider my testimony and support this life-saving bill. Thank You again for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.