



# Oregon

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## COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS' ASSOCIATION

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Statement in Support of HB 4065  
Public Hearing, 6 FEB 2012  
Hearing Room D, 8:00 a.m.

On behalf of the Oregon County Veteran Service Officers Association (OCVSOA), please accept the following comments in support of HB 4065.

We support HB 4065 because our work exemplifies the economic development activities which this act seeks to sustain. With the creation of the County Veteran Service Offices (CVSO) Expansion and Enhancement program, CVSO's have been able to help increase the amount of veteran benefits coming into our state from \$541,793,000 in 2005 FFY (Federal Fiscal Year) to \$844,587,000 in 2010, FFY. This increase of \$300+ million has come during a time of a virtually unprecedented economic downturn and has helped support local economies and provide relief to other social and health care services - all at the cost of only about \$7 million in State General Fund.

Many veterans served by County and State Veteran Services Officers, when they first make contact, are struggling financially. Most clients are either barely making ends meet with public assistance, or are not making ends meet and are either at-risk of or are actually homeless. Through the help of Veteran Service Officers and the veteran benefits we help them obtain, they are often able to become taxpayer supporters of services, instead of utilizers of such services.

There are many examples of veterans we have assisted who, sometimes after long fights with the federal Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), receive large retroactive benefit awards and continuing monthly benefits, just a few of which are provided here:

- In Jackson County, the CVSO worked with a veteran of Desert Shield/Desert Storm. When they first started to work with this veteran, he was living on the street and had a high mistrust of the VA – likely from past denials and problems. The CVSO worked hard to gain his trust and convinced him to let them help him through the claims process. They were eventually successful at getting him total disability benefits and the veteran now has an apartment, a car and is doing much better with VA provided health care and treatment.
- In Douglas County, a veteran stopped in because of a pension debt he owed to VA. After the CVSO analyzed his situation, they determined he was actually eligible for compensation due to an Agent Orange-related condition. With the CVSO's assistance, he was ultimately awarded total disability benefits of about \$3000 per month and a retroactive award of \$349,000. This veteran was previously trying to surviving on about a \$1000 per month. He has since been able to purchase a home and now pays property taxes.
- In Lane County, a veteran was also assisted in obtaining total benefits. This allowed him to purchase a home in Linn County and the financial stability permitted him and his partner to finally

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marry, thereby removing his wife and two step-children from the rolls of public assistance upon which they had been reliant.

- In Morrow County, the veteran passed away and tragically, the surviving spouse also lost her eyesight. The spouse lost her job and was raising the two children on only Social Security. With the help of the Morrow CVSO, the spouse was awarded survivors benefits of about \$1400 per month, which also included health insurance and education benefits for her and the children, one of whom will soon be pursuing his college degree.
- In Multnomah County, the CVSO worked with a veteran with ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease). He was on Medicaid and referred to the CVSO to get help filing a claim. Through the help of the CVSO, the VA was awarded a benefit of over \$6000 per month which allowed him to come off Medicaid but still stay in his home and support his family.

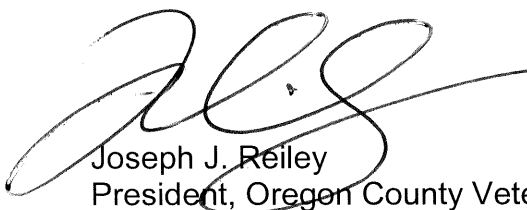
In addition to working with those eligible for compensation as shown above, there are also over 5,500 veterans who receive non-service connected pension. These are often older veterans (over 76% are over 55) who need some level of long-term care. Many of these veterans would be on Medicaid were it not for the benefits received through VA.

We also help take a great deal of pressure off local private and public health care resources. We have helped enroll many of the nearly 100,000 Oregon veterans who utilize VA health care. For many this main or even sole source of health care is provided by VA at no-charge or with minimal co-payments.

Finally, we also help veterans fulfill their educational goals. Older veterans, who usually are not eligible for the GI Bill, often become eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation benefits based on our efforts.

For veterans recently discharged, we help them figure out the pluses and minuses of their various education benefits, as well as complete a full analysis of their entire potential VA benefits eligibility. Towards this end, many County Veteran Service Offices have some sort of relationship with their local institutions of higher education. Some CVSO's set up shop at their local college so veterans can access them on campus; others attend joint meetings with college staff or student veteran group leaders to insure campus leaders know about CVSO in order to refer veteran-students.

Thank you for your consideration and staunch support of Oregon's veterans. We hope that you will continue to recognize that through the efforts of VSO's, Oregon veterans receive hundreds of millions of dollars in VA benefits which they spend in their communities, have less reliance on public assistance programs and community health care resources and have greater access to education. All of these provide significant support to our local and state economy while allowing public and non-profit agencies to spend local and state general fund on more non-veterans in need.



Joseph J. Reiley  
President, Oregon County Veteran Service Officer Association