

**Testimony of Commissioner Martha Schrader, Clackamas County
In Support of HJR 29
House Committee on Veterans' Services & Emergency Preparedness
Thursday, April 4, 2013**

Good afternoon, Chair Matthews & Members of the Committee:

For the record my name is Martha Schrader, Clackamas County Commissioner. Thank you for the opportunity to voice my strong support of HJR 29. I had the pleasure of working with Representative Julie Parrish to introduce this resolution, which would refer to voters a ballot measure that would dedicate five percent of net lottery proceeds to veterans' services and programs. If passed into law by voters, proceeds would be used to fund services that are essential to reintegrating soldiers into civilian life, such as employment and education programs, healthcare, including mental health, and housing for homeless veterans.

Roughly 375,000 living Oregonians set aside their personal aspirations and safety to serve their country in times of war. Many of these service members face serious challenges readjusting to civilian life after their return home. The challenges faced by returning veterans and their families are significant:

- The unemployment rate among post-9/11 veterans continues to outpace the national average. Veterans need assistance to translate their military skills into civilian jobs. They also need meaningful education and workforce training opportunities to find employment in a high-demand field.
- Multiple deployments for soldiers in the post-9/11 wars have led to a dramatic spike in mental health needs. Of the veterans who sought services from VA hospitals in the last 10 years, over 53 percent sought mental health care, which includes treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, psychosis, alcohol and drug abuse. Left untreated, these invisible wounds have a devastating impact on the lives of veterans and their family members. On average, every PTSD sufferer profoundly affects 10 other family members or close friends.
- Veterans are more likely than the rest of us to experience homelessness. It is estimated that one in six homeless adults once wore a uniform in service to our country. Researchers have also noted a disproportionate rise in the number of homeless veterans aged 18-30, many of whom fought in Iraq and Afghanistan. Based on Clackamas County's most recent Homeless Count, the number of homeless veterans in Clackamas County rose from 74 in 2009 to 120 in 2011, a 62 percent increase in two years. Medical issues, mental health concerns and an inability to find a decent paying job are all contributing factors.
- Veterans and their families often express difficulty navigating the benefits and services available to them. The Clackamas County Veterans Service Office (VSO), like other county and campus VSOs, are experts in providing information and referrals to veterans and connecting them to available benefits and resources. Additional funds would help VSOs increase their capacity to serve veterans and reduce turn around time for claims.

These challenges underscore the urgent need to fully fund the programs our veterans need. It is critical that we have the resources to care for and support all veterans, including this generation of veterans, and their family members throughout their lifetimes.

I urge your support of HJR 29 and thank you for your consideration.