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Ms. Tiffany Koss  
Committee Assistant  
Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development  
Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
Oregon State Legislature  
900 Court Street NE, Room H-178  
Salem, Oregon 97301

May 15, 2013

Re: SB 762, relating to veterans, directing the ODVA to conduct a public outreach campaign to prevent veteran suicide and to increase awareness of veteran's federal VA benefits.

Dear Co-chairs Jenson, Johnson and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to give testimony about Senate Bill 762. This bill is about saving lives. Without going into great detail, the most effective method to reach veterans to prevent suicide or increase their awareness of federal VA benefits is through those they trust the most, their friends, family and neighbors. We need to empower our communities to recognize the signs of possible suicide and where to turn for help for that veteran. We also need to empower our communities to know basic information about federal veteran's benefits and where to direct veterans to obtain those benefits. Such empowerment will save lives and improve the quality of live for Oregon's veterans. I am aware and applaud efforts to enroll veterans through the DMV and other agencies. However, nothing is as effective as word-of-mouth advertising. This bill will not supplant other veteran's programs. It is another part of the solution.

ODVA does not have sufficient fiscal resources to expand their current programs. As a former school administrator, I had more funds in my annual budget for a few hundred students in special education than ODVA has for over 330,000 veterans. While I would rather we do a more aggressive outreach program, this bill is a start. I anticipate it will raise a modest amount that will fund a few staff members and pay for necessary outreach expenses. I anticipate the more ODVA promotes this outreach, the greater the contributions. I wish we could fund this without contributions, given the deadly serious nature of the problem, however, I am a realist. We start with what is possible and proceed. Lastly, helping veterans obtain their federal VA benefits has a fiscal benefit to the state. Helping veterans who are Medicaid eligible transition to their federal VA benefits frees up state Medicaid money. A successful veteran's suicide prevention and benefits awareness outreach program should prove a win-win for the veteran, the State and all concerned.

It was my intent when I began to work on this legislative concept that the outreach would be a step forward. I am aware that various existing programs were impacted by the federal sequestering. While those programs are important, I want to see the funds raised by the procedures in this bill used to expand awareness, not continue the status quo. If we are to

significantly reduce veteran suicide in this state and improve veteran utilization of federal VA benefits, we must reach out aggressively.

I urge the Committee to hold a work session on SB 762 and move it to the floor for a vote.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Huddle', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John Huddle, Ed.D.  
Army Veteran