



Oregon

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House Committee on Rules

HB 2206 – State Assumption of County Functions

Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee,

For the record my name is Mitch Sparks and I work for the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs. I am here today to explain the section of HB 2206 that pertains to providing veteran services through a County Veteran Service Officer and how the state would assume those duties should a county not provide that service.

Under ORS 408.410, a county may appoint a veteran service officer to provide veteran service. The County Veteran Service Officer program is an "opt-in" program and not a mandate for counties. Every county in Oregon has a service officer, except Marion and Polk counties; ODVA provides services for those counties.

Under current statute, if a county providing veteran services opts out of the program, monies passed through ODVA to that county are redistributed to the remaining counties providing services. HB 2206 amends that statute to ensure that ODVA maintains those pass-through dollars which then must be used to continue services in that county.

There are several ways the agency could continue those services, including:

- Contract the existing veteran service officer to continue their work
- Ask an adjacent county to provide the service
- Contract with a separate entity to provide the service
- Have state VSOs provide the service
- Provide a regional VSO to "circuit ride" throughout the region, much like the Campus VSOs did previously

The option we would choose would be based on the circumstances of the county or counties that opted out.

Our piece of HB 2206 has one more component. The United State Department of Veterans Affairs plans to go paperless by June 2013. This means all claims filed will have to be done electronically. Last session, the Legislative Fiscal Office indicated that their reading of current statute allowed the agency to bring each county into a centralized computer system for this purpose. Our reading of that statute left us uncomfortable as to our ability to do so. We have strengthened that language in HB 2206 to ensure every county filing claims under the authority of ODVA uses our cloud-based system called VetraSpec. I am happy to report that nearly every county has voluntarily signed up for this system, which only costs them \$399 per user per year when the sign up under ODVA's user agreement. This system will allow every CVSO and State VSO to file claims electronically with VA.

Thank you for your time and I'd be happy to answer any questions.