

My name is Michael Burton, 15912 NE 102<sup>nd</sup> Street Vancouver Wash

I am here to speak in favor of HB 2838.

I am a retired officer, I spent a total of 38 years in the USAF.

In 2008 I was asked by the Governor Kulongoski to co-chair a task force on Veterans Services. Subsequently in 2009-2010 I chaired a Legislative Task Force on Veteran reintegration.

Those task forces examined wide variety of issues facing members of our military forces both while on active duty and when they were demobilized or left service.

We found that Oregon could be proud that it was doing so much to try to meet the needs our men and women as they tried to transition to civilian life.

We also found that there were significant gaps. These ranged from a need to improve inter-communications between resources to specifically addressing gender-based issues. As a result a number of legislative initiatives were introduced in the 2009 session and I am pleased to say that most of these were passed by this body.

The task forces particularly noted the role of the Veteran Services Officers. The VSO as you know is a highly trained individual who assists veterans through may be termed a mouse-maze of hoops. The VSO can assist a veteran with matters such as obtaining a DD Form 214, being the starting point for any veteran to get help for resolving complex applications for disability to obtaining housing or even food.

There are two problems with this: there are not enough VSO's because there isn't enough money and the veterans have to "come in" before they can get help.

I served ten years as a member of the House and much of that on Ways and Means, so I understand about the money issues; there never is enough ....period.

However what is the cost if we don't fund additional VSOs?

This bill specifically calls for VSOs who will be assigned to provide services for veterans who have already been incarcerated as well as their families.

Three years ago I was diagnosed with PTSD. Because of physical pain and mental imbalance I was living on a diet of prescription drugs and my persona choice of drugs, bourbon. I crashed.

I don't know if any of you has seen the short documentary film "Crisis Hotline, Veterans Push 1" which was just awarded the Academy Award. I pushed 1 and it saved my life.

I was lucky enough to "come in" I got a VSO, I was directed to the VA and underwent an intensive 14 month rehab and therapy recovery. I was inches away from falling totally of the edge. I was lucky I came in and I knew enough about how to do that that I survived.

But far too many veterans don't have my luck. Many, perhaps most who find themselves in trouble are thee due to a combination of PTSD, drug abuse or alcoholism. They don't know how or will not come in and the result is often they find themselves in legal trouble often serious enough to find themselves in jail or prison. It costs about \$30K a year to incarcerate a prisoner in Oregon and I'm sure that doesn't count the debt service cost on the buildings.

While a member of the Legislature I served as Chair of the Criminal Justice sub-committee and the Governor's Task Force on Prison reform as well as the Legislative member of the Criminal Justice Commission.

Key question was always how to reduce recidivism way is to link the inmate to a solid outside environment and mentor once he or she is out. That is a key way to prevent recidivism and reduce cost to the system

There is much a VSO can do for an incarcerated veteran while they are in prison but perhaps more critical is to be the person who is there once that veteran is out and head him or her in the right direction for help.

This bill and its funding will do much to help these veterans and to help Oregon.