



House Veterans and Emergency Preparedness Committee

House Bill 3303 | March 19, 2015

**Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs Testimony
HB 3303 and the 2014 Oregon Veteran Owned Business Opportunity Showcase**

Chair Lively and members of the committee, for the record my name is Marc Huchette and I am with the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs Communication Team. I am here today to testify on HB 3303 that provides for certification of service-disabled veterans through the Oregon Business Development Department. The concept for this bill started during the planning process for ODVA's Veteran Owned Business Opportunity Showcase (VOBOS) that we hosted last fall.

The collaborative partnership between ODVA, the Department of Administrative Services (DAS), the Oregon Business Development Department (Business Oregon) and the Governor's office made this event successful. Rep. Gomberg, the sponsor of this important bill, was our keynote speaker.

I wanted to tell the committee about the VOBOS conference in order that you may better understand the purpose of the bill in context.

Background

In June of 2014, the Federal VA's Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization contacted ODVA and encouraged us to host an event which would promote veteran business owners in the procurement process with the state and federal government. We recognized the tremendous potential this event would have for connecting veterans to business opportunities and resources and to provide them with much-needed information and technical assistance.

ODVA partnered with Business Oregon, DAS, Oregon Department of Transportation, the Governor's Economic & Business Equity Office, the Secretary of State's Business Xpress office, the federal Small Business Administration in Oregon and their Small Business Development Centers to create a stakeholder working group to help plan this event.

Stakeholder Work Group

From July through September of last year, a 12-member stakeholder work group representing multiple agencies and organizations developed a business showcase event with a veteran-focused curriculum for current and prospective veteran business owners. We called the event the “Veteran Owned Business Opportunity Showcase, or VOBOS.

The curriculum we developed identified three different courses or paths for the veterans to choose.

- Path 1, called “Start,” was geared toward veterans who wanted to start their own business.
- Path 2, called “Stability,” was geared toward veterans who were already in business and wanted to create stability.
- Path 3, called “Growth,” was geared toward veteran businesses that were stable and ready to engage in procurement opportunities with the state or federal government.

Because this event was the first time ODVA had fully tapped into the veteran business-owner community, we were not clear how many veterans might attend. Within the first month of promoting the event, we had to close the registration, having reached maximum capacity of 180 veteran participants. This confirmed our initial theory that there were a tremendous number of current and prospective veteran business owners looking for information, assistance, resources and business opportunities.

As the stakeholder group continued to meet to identify the “path” to successful business for veterans in Oregon, we worked with Representative Gomberg to support his efforts to create a certification for service-disabled veteran-owned business for the state procurement process.

We hosted the event at Camp Withycombe on October 17. The event included structured networking opportunities, resource tables, and training classes geared toward each training course: those starting a business, those running a new business and those with an established business. Representative Gomberg was our keynote speaker for the event and we were able to directly connect him with veteran business owners who were interested in providing input on a service-disabled veteran certification process.

VOBOS was an overwhelming success for many different reasons. One key benefit to the state and federal agencies involved was that we reached out and connected to a very specific veteran population for the first time.

We are very proud of the fact that the Federal VA has adopted our event design and our training concept of providing veterans with three “paths” or training courses design as the standard for all states to use nationwide for veteran-owned business opportunity showcases.

The partnership and state-wide collaboration for this event allowed us to create something that was meaningful and relevant to veterans. Those partnerships continue as veteran business owners are now being connected with the excellent business outreach initiative called Connect 2 Oregon that is hosted by DAS, Business Oregon and ODOT. Representative Gomberg’s support and participation in the event was greatly appreciated by the organizers and all veterans who attended.

Thank you. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.