

May 19, 2015

Representative John Lively, Chair
Representative Sal Esquivel, Vice-Chair
Representative Deborah Boone, Vice-Chair
House Veterans and Emergency Preparedness Committee
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Chair Lively, Vice-Chair Esquivel, Vice-Chair Boone and Members of the Committee,

I am here today to testify in support of SB 87.

SB 87 is a comprehensive approach to veterans preference in public employment that was developed by a diverse work group, including counties, cities and state agencies. Based upon a request from members of the 2014 Legislature, SB 87 is the result of eight months of collaboration among a 13-member work group; five of the work group members were veterans.

An important goal for the work group members was to ensure that veterans and disabled veterans receive no less than the level of special consideration that is provided in current statutes. SB 87 is designed to apply a fair and meaningful preference at every key stage in the hiring process and creates more defined opportunities for qualified and competitive veterans to have an initial interview.

SB 87 would require that public employers interview at least five veterans during an unscored hiring process. Another new benefit to veterans in SB 87 is the requirement that an employer give the same weight to a veteran's transferrable skills as the employer gives to skills and experience obtained outside of the military. Finally, SB 87 would require that during the final selection stage, if a veteran or disabled veteran is equally or better qualified than any other candidate, the employer must offer the position to the veteran.

The purposes of SB 87 are to:

- Provide veterans a meaningful, fair and uniform hiring process for veterans preference in public employment
- Emphasize importance of initial interviews for veterans and disabled veterans
- Design universal methods for applying veterans preference that can be used by all public employers

- Require employers to give the same weight to a veteran's transferrable skills as the employer give to skills and experience obtained outside of the military
- Define terms clearly and use plain language that is easily understood by both veterans and employers.

The existing statutes on veterans preference are unclear, confusing and provide no real guidance on implementation for public employers. SB 87 has defined terms, clearly states legislative intent, policy and purposes, and applies a preference process using methods that can be easily understood by veterans and public employers. The changes to the statute would resolve significant problems with the current statute and give veterans meaningful preference in the employment process.

We believe that a strong veterans preference statute is important because it recognizes the sacrifices made by the men and women who have served in the Armed Forces, it restores veterans to a competitive position for public employment, and it acknowledges a greater obligation owed to service-connected disabled veterans. Veterans have proven to be valued employees due to their rigorous training, sense of teamwork, leadership skills and abilities to learn new skills and concepts.

Sincerely,

Sid Leiken
Commissioner, Lane County

Pat Farr
Commissioner, Lane County