



Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service

June 19, 2015

The Hon. Richard Devlin
Senate
State of Oregon
Salem, OR

The Hon. Ann Lininger
House of Representatives
State of Oregon
Salem, OR

Dear Sen. Devlin and Rep. Lininger:

I am writing to you today on behalf of a constituent of yours who formerly served as a commissioned officer in the United States Public Health Service (USPHS). He would like to pay into the Oregon Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS) to gain credit for the time that he served on active duty with the USPHS, but he is currently precluded from doing so because Oregon law only allows former members of the armed forces to do so.

We respectfully ask that you consider changing the law in the State of Oregon to allow former USPHS officers to make such payments. We ask this because the USPHS is one of the seven uniformed services of the United States, and its members are completely analogous to those who serve in the armed forces of our country. They are analogous because they wear military uniforms, receive military pay and allowances, shop at military commissaries and exchanges, qualify for TRICARE healthcare coverage, and are considered Veterans by the United States Government for all programs administered by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

Further, they form our country's first-line defense against disease and disasters brought on by natural and manmade causes. They deploy in the event of hurricanes and tropical storms, as they did by the thousands when Katrina, Rita and Sandy hit our country; they deploy in the aftermath of manmade tragedies such as the Newtown, CT, shootings, when USPHS mental health teams went into the community and provided counseling services; they deployed in large numbers with U.S. military forces to both Iraq and Afghanistan; they provide all of the healthcare to the United States Coast Guard and to the officer corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and just this past year they deployed to Liberia, where they were the only U.S. government healthcare workers who actually risked their lives treating Ebola patients. They are in so many ways indistinguishable from members of the U.S. armed forces, except that they wear a different set of uniforms.

We do not believe that there is any reason why the privilege of paying into OPERS for their service should be denied to these fine officers. They are few in number, so any fiscal impact upon the State of Oregon will be minuscule. We believe that it is only right that they be afforded the ability to "buy" their previous service into OPERS the same as is allowed to members of the military services. We hope that your colleagues will agree.

Sincerely,

Col. James T. Currie, USA (ret.)
Executive Director