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## House Veterans and Emergency Preparedness Committee

Chair Evans, Vice Chairs Boone and Esquivel and members of the committee. My name is Lew Franklin and I have been teaching at Linn-Benton Community College (LBCC) for 16 years.

I am a retired First Sergeant of the Oregon Army National Guard, with 21 years of service, 2 deployments to Iraq and a deployment to Louisiana to support of Hurricane Katrina operations in 2005.

I have been the advisor of the LBCC veterans club since 2010. There are roughly 300 veterans that attend Linn-Benton Community College.

The Veterans club was created in it's current form in 2010. The membership of the current club is approximately 30 – 50 members with approximately 14 active members. The club offers mentoring and comradery for those making the transition to civilian life or those Veterans who are just starting to explore college life. The club offers a "bookshelf" of shared books to help offset text book costs. We moved into the current Veterans Center in the Spring of 2016.

Vice Chair Monnes-Anderson, currently I am failing, that may seem overly dramatic but that is the reality.

The students in my program and the 300 Veteran students at LBCC are being shorted because there is simply not enough of me.

As I mentioned, LBCC roughly 300 student Veterans, and does not have a single staff dedicated 100% to their needs.

I do not blame LBCC, we are a small college located in the shadow of Oregon State and money is always tight.

Last year LBCC saw the culmination of ten years of work. In the fall of 2015 we acquired a chunk of real estate on the Albany campus.

Using the lessons learned by Oregon State and their "veteran's lounge", the LBCC Vets club along with the support of one of LBCC's VPs, was able to secure a little used room to serve as a Veterans Center.

The remodel and furnishing of that room were not funded in any way by the school due to limitations of funding. The community and the students came together to make it happen. Had there been money available the center would have happened long ago.

To put numbers to the impact of the center, prior to the center I had anywhere from 1 to 3 active Veterans, since the center opening last spring, I have over 12 active veterans. Please remember that I am doing this as a volunteer advisor.

On a daily basis the center serves as a meeting place / safe zone, and study area for at least 20 veteran students.

In the center a Veteran can feel "at home", with the branch flags standing in a place of honor, a place to get some coffee, to share insights or stories as copies of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence watch from wall.

As a group these Veterans are becoming more engaged with the campus and the community. This year the Veterans are talking about offering classes on networking and interviewing to the general student population.

Student Veterans are a unique population and clearly thrive when they have a space dedicated to them.

The other day I was talking with my Dean and he asked me how much time I spend on Veterans issues. I replied that I could easily spend two-thirds of my workload on Veteran issues alone. I receive no release time and no pay for what I do for the Veterans, I do it because I am dedicated to Veterans and their needs.

I have seen the good that dedicated Veteran staffs and centers have done at OSU and Western Oregon.

I feel that community colleges and universities state wide could benefit from three simple things that Senate Bill 143 could help to provide:

1 A Veterans Resource Center (ideally a one stop Veteran Service Center where the certifying official, counseling and a meeting area are all centrally located).

2 Affiliation with a National organization such as the Student Veterans of America (SVA). They have resources, training and motivational benefits.

3 A dedicated Veteran resource coordinator who is not also tasked as the certifying official. College students generally are only around for two to four years and their focus needs to be their education. A dedicated staff member offers the consistency and smooth transition as students move through the education process. Campus veteran resource coordinators help veterans transition to campus life and support them on completing their education. They can connect veteran with community resources. They can provide an important link to county veteran service officers for federal benefits.

Veterans are a unique population with unique insight into the world, and generally a slightly broader life experience. They are quick to become active in their schools and in their communities, and are more likely to stay active well past their graduation.

But, and this is a big but, they have to be engaged early on, they need to feel integrated and a part of something. Being with other Vets helps with this transition.

Colleges can be intimidating liberal bastions in the eyes of a Veteran. Having a Veteran center and staff will be crucial to transitions and engagement for student Veterans.

I thank you for your time. I welcome any questions you might have.