

Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States

FOUNDED 1899



— HEADQUARTERS —

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15 February 2017

Joint Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development.
900 Court St. NE, H178
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Co-Chair Johnson and Co-Chair Gomberg,

On 14 December 2016 Department of Oregon Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States presented testimony to the Senate and House Interim Committees on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness. We offer that same testimony to you today. It is our sincerest hope that this testimony will provide you with helpful information in your efforts to determine funding for Veteran Services.

GOVERNOR'S BUDGET:

The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States has a long and proud history working with and for veterans. We are the largest Combat Veteran Organization in the United States, comprised of Veterans who have served in every overseas conflict since the Spanish American War. While our membership consists of combat veterans, our mission and our greatest passion; is serving ALL veterans, service members and their families.

On December 1, 2016 Governor Brown's proposed budget for the 2017-2019 biennium was released. We were very disappointed to read the proposal to cut 45% from General Fund for veterans' services. That is nearly 10 million dollars. We believe that Oregon has a General Fund responsibility to our veterans. When the Oregon Voters passed Measure 96 by 84%, the largest margin of any measure in the history of our great state, they did so with the understanding that; the 1.5% of the lottery funds would be a supplement to the current service level from the General Fund, not a substitute of those funds.

On November 8, 2016, the voters overwhelmingly spoke in support of significant increases in the Veterans Service budget for current and future years. The Department of Oregon, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States understands that there are many factors and problems in balancing the budget and ensuring that all Oregonians are represented. In those deliberations consider the Veterans of Foreign Wars and other Veterans Service Organizations, when we ask you to continue the States responsibility to veterans from the General Fund at the current level and to supplement Veterans Services from the Measure 96 lottery funds. In doing so. You honor and benefit veterans and their families, but you also honor the wishes of the Oregon voter and benefit the economy.

BACKGROUND:

Department of Oregon, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States has been dedicated to providing a Veterans Service Office serving all veterans for over 70 years. The Department of Oregon Veterans Service Office operates in the VA Regional Office under the administrative supervision of the Department Commander and under the technical supervision of the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Service Office. Over the years as the VA system has become more complex and the demand for Veterans Services has increased our resources have declined. We need your help to assist our comrades. Our situation is summarized below.

FACTS:

1. VFW Service Officers have routinely handled about twice the number of claims (480) as average (180) for Service Officers state wide.
2. VFW Service Office has routinely obtained \$20,000,000 to \$35,000,000 in annual VA payments to veterans in earned benefits. (1.5 to 2 Service Officers)
3. VFW Service Officers have been compensated at about 50% of the rate paid to average VSO s in the State.
4. Low compensation levels have made it difficult to hire and retain qualified personnel.
5. Training for VFW Service Officers provided by VFW National Service Office is considered among the best in the Nation.
6. Heavy work load with minimal staffing has caused the service to individual veterans to be below desired standards.
7. Annual funds available from Veterans of Foreign Wars is limited to \$50,000.00 plus \$13,800.00 from State of Oregon through ODVA.
8. Department of Oregon Veterans of Foreign Wars provides funding to the VFW VA Volunteer Services Representatives at VA medical facilities in Portland, Roseburg and White City to purchase comfort items for patients. (\$150.00 per month to each, total annual expense \$5,400.00). The cost is part of our Service Office budget.

ASSUMPTIONS:

1. Staffing level of the Department of Oregon Veterans of Foreign Wars Service Office needs to be increased to four service officers and one administrative position to provide the expected level of service to the veterans requesting service from this office.
2. In order to hire and retain qualified service officers to meet required staffing levels, compensation must be increased to levels closer to that paid to service officers throughout the state.
3. The fourth service officer will be primarily used for outreach to the 80 plus Posts in 14 Districts around the state. Allows Department of Oregon VFW to leverage the 95+ volunteer Post and District Service Officers.
4. Travel rates paid for outreach work will be at GSA per diem rates and mileage at IRS rate.

PROPOSAL:

1. Department of Oregon Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States request \$278,172 per year in lottery funds to provide Veterans Service Officers.
2. Department of Oregon Veterans of Foreign Wars Service Office staffing level will be one service officer, three assistant service officers and one admin position.
3. Compensation and benefits will be:
 - a. Service Officer: \$66,110
 - b. Assistant Service Officer: \$61,162
 - c. Admin: \$39,226
4. In state travel for outreach: \$40,750 (2,000 miles per month, 16 days per month)
5. Office expense: \$7,000, plus \$5,400 VAVS: \$12,400
6. Total Service Office budget: \$341,972 plus VFW National provided training and insurance.
7. Available funding: \$63,800.

ADVANTAGES of VFW SERVICE OFFICERS:

1. Clearly there is a large population of veterans that prefer a VFW Service Officer, in part due to a 16,000 membership of combat veterans.
2. VFW Service Officers have, and will continue to work at less than the average compensation level for Service Officers state wide.
3. VFW Service Officers have a record of higher productivity than the average Service Officer with over \$200 of earned benefits obtained for veterans for each dollar invested.
4. Training and technical oversight provided by National VFW is the best available.
5. The 95+ volunteer Post and District Service Officers can be leveraged with competent accredited Department Service Officers.

CONCLUSION:

Providing the requested funding of \$278,122 will meet the very purpose of Measure 96 by providing competent Veterans Services in an efficient manner to a large population of veterans that prefer to be represented by a VFW Service Officer. It is expected that the \$278,000 annual investment will generate an additional \$28,000,000 in earned benefits to the veterans served by the VFW Service Office. Just as important as the monetary return is the increased quality of service that will be provided to the veterans served.

Thank you for all the hard work and dedication to Veterans and their families and to Oregon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Halverson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Richard Halverson
Commander
Department of Oregon
Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States