

HB 2139 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

House Committee On Veterans and Emergency Management

Action Date: 03/09/21

Action: Do pass and be referred to Ways and Means by prior reference

Vote: 6-0-0-0

Yeas: 6 - Evans, Grayber, Lewis, Meek, Wallan, Wright

Fiscal: Fiscal impact issued

Revenue: No revenue impact

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Meeting Dates: 1/26, 2/23, 3/9

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Reestablishes Rural Veterans Healthcare Transportation Grant Program within Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA) to assist with transport of rural veterans to receive health care. Allows grants for transportation regardless of whether care being received is covered by any federal benefit plan. Deems federally recognized Indian tribes eligible to receive grants.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Filling gap for rural veterans; complimenting federal Highly Rural Transportation Grants (HRTG)
- Creating a program versus continuing as budgetary line item
- Veterans work group

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

The federal Veterans Administration (VA) provides Highly Rural Transportation Grants (HRTG) that help veterans in eligible, remote areas access transportation to and from VA health care appointments at no cost. Currently, ten counties in Oregon qualify for HRTG funds: Baker, Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Lake, Malheur, Morrow, Sherman, Wallowa, and Wheeler.

The Rural Veterans Healthcare Transportation Grant Program was created in the 2019-2021 budget for the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA), to make additional funds available for one fiscal year to supplement federal HRTG funds and serve veterans in rural areas who did not meet the federal definition of "highly rural." ODVA partners with the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) to administer the program and disburse funds. Current service areas include Klamath, Deschutes, Crook, and Jefferson counties and the Warm Springs Reservation.

House Bill 2139 reestablishes the Rural Veterans Healthcare Transportation Grant Program in statute to continue providing funds to transport rural veterans to receive health care.