

Testimony to the House Veterans and Emergency Management Committee

HB 2856-1A

Position: **Favorable** March 23, 2021

The Honorable Paul Evans, Chair
House Veterans and Emergency Management Committee
CC: Honorable Members of the House Veterans and Emergency Management Committee

Dear Chair Evans and Members of the Committee:

My name is Marco Oswald, and I am a military Veteran with 33 years of service with the United States Army. I am a resident of Sweet Home, Oregon, and submit this testimony as the Legislative Committee Vice-Chair representing the United Veterans' Groups of Oregon (UVGO). The UVGO represents the unanimous position of 13 major Veterans' organizations in Oregon. UVGO membership is listed at the end of this testimony.

The United Veterans' Group of Oregon (UVGO) strongly supports the -1 Amendment to HB 2856, with additional recommendations below.

The UVGO strongly supports the intent of this legislation (and others such as SB 184) to extend additional preference elements to Veterans in the hiring process for State civil service positions.

We also support the legislative intent to modify the ORS definition of a "Veteran" for public service positions with the objective of ensuring that persons considered or administratively ruled a Veteran for U.S. Veterans Administration benefits and federal law be also considered a Veteran for Oregon State law and civil service hiring and promotion purposes.

We note the considered responses by the Oregon State Bar Association (hereinafter, OSB testimony) and the Oregon County Veterans Service Officer's Association (hereinafter, VSOA testimony), and offer the following comments:

Amending the ORS Definition of Veteran (ORS 408.225):

1. We agree with the OSB testimony that noted that the proposed definition of "Honorable conditions," (pg 3, lines 24-26) could result in confusion. Federal Veterans' preference is extended to persons with (a) Honorable, or, (b) General (under honorable conditions) discharges. As proposed, a hiring agency may mistakenly determine that the preference isn't extended to persons with a General discharge (under honorable conditions), when both the Honorable discharge and the General discharge (under honorable conditions) are recognized as honorable. Noting which of the seven military discharge characterizations qualify as under "honorable conditions" for the preference may minimize any confusion.

2. We agree with the VSOA testimony which recommended adding language to the effect that “Those who have a service-connected condition as determined by the federal Department of Veteran Affairs,” to ensure service members injured in the performance of Active Duty for Training (ADT) are equally considered as a Veteran under Oregon law.

Amending ORS 408.235 (Veteran’s Preference):

1. We concur with VSOA testimony advocating new language to ensure that National Guard and Reservists whose cumulative service qualifies the servicemember for retirement benefits, which are postponed until age 60 (or as adjusted for deployments) are considered Veterans for Oregon State law when they receive official notification of eligibility.

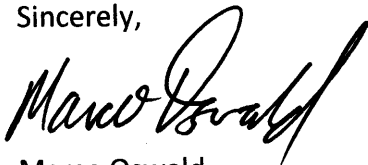
2. We agree with OSB testimony that the proposed amendment should extend the hiring preference to persons who are within 120 days of a regular or medical separation, and who furnish certification that they are expected to receive a discharge under honorable conditions.

3. Finally, we agree with the intent expressed in a separate legislation, SB 184, which would ensure that the Veterans hiring preference of 5 or 10 points is expressed as a percentage in calculating the full score. It would be ideal if the -1 Amendment to HB 2139 could incorporate this proposal.

On behalf of the United Veterans’ Groups of Oregon and our state’s Veterans, the UVGO urges the committee to support the -1 Amendment to HB 2856 and the benefits it will bring to our Veterans.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide the UVGO position on this important legislative issue.

Sincerely,



Marco Oswald
UVGO Legislative Committee Vice-Chair

Membership in United Veterans’ Groups of Oregon: Air Force Association; American Legion; Association of the United States Army; Disabled American Veterans; Korean War Veterans’ Association; Military Officers Association of America; Military Order of the Purple Heart; National Association of Atomic and Nuclear Veterans, Inc.; Non-Commissioned Officers Association; Paralyzed Veterans of America; Veterans of Foreign Wars, Vietnam Veterans of America; and the 40+8.