

Submitter: SgtMaj Robert Herndon, USMC (Ret'd)
On Behalf of: Disabled Veterans
Committee: House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Management
Measure: HB4066

Good afternoon Chair Grayber and members of the committee. My name is Sgt Maj Robert Herndon, USMC, Ret. I proudly served my country for 29 years in the United States Marine Corps serving 2 tours in Vietnam, and 1 tour in the First Gulf War.

I am submitting this testimony in support of HB4066, Property Tax Forgiveness, which would improve the property tax exemption for 100% Service Connected Disabled Veterans who are 65 or older.

The common practice today is when you see a Veteran, to thank them for their service. Although a hand shake and a thank you are appreciated, they don't do much to keep a veteran in their home. Disabled veterans are often unable to enter the workforce once discharged from the military due to their disability. Those unable to work are reliant solely on their disability pay and, since they do not have the benefit of a union to negotiate annual pay raises, they only receive a minuscule annual increase in comparison to inflation for the year. It is easy to see that year after year the Disabled Veteran's income is outpaced by inflation.

Without any means to increase their income, Disabled Veterans are faced with an ever increasing cost to survive in a country they fought to protect. The lack of resources often ends in the veteran and their children living in poverty, a lack of heat, food insecurity, or loss of housing. For example, in 2019, Oregon Housing and Community Services estimated that there are over 1400 homeless veterans on any given night in Oregon, with many more at risk of homelessness.

According to Military Vets Info, as of today, in Oregon, a disabled veteran or surviving spouse may receive a property tax exemption on his/her primary residence up to \$27,228, if the veteran is 40 percent or more disabled as a result of service. In comparison, 14 states provide less than this, but 35 states provide a higher property tax deduction including 19 states that provide a 100% property tax exemption to Disabled Veterans based on their disability percentage.

It is only just, that we as a state honor those that fought for our freedoms, many giving their lives, bodies, or minds and many sacrificing the welfare of their families. It would be a small token of our appreciation to provide for these Disabled Veterans.

As stated in Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address with regards to the soldier returning from war "To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan," President Lincoln affirmed the governments obligation to care for those injured during the war and to provide for the families of those who perished on the battle field.

House Bill 4066 demonstrates Oregon's appreciation for the sacrifice of our disabled veterans and their surviving spouse. I encourage you to vote yes on HB4066 regarding exempting taxation on homestead or personal property of 100% disabled veterans age 65 and older.