

House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans

Chair: Representative Thuy Tran

Vice-Chairs: Representative Dacia Grayber and Representative Rick Lewis

Members: Representative Curt Boice; Representative Paul Evans; Representative Alek Skarlatos; and Representative Mari Watanabe

March 9, 2025

Chair Tran, Vice Chairs Grayber and Lewis, and members of the Committee:

My name is Valdez Bravo, and I am a US Army (OEF) veteran who lives in Lake Oswego, Oregon. I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 2537, which establishes the Veterans Waiver Program to provide medical assistance to low-income veterans in our state.

HB 2537 is a crucial step towards ensuring that our veterans have access to the health care they deserve. This bill would create a program within the Oregon Health Authority to provide medical assistance to veterans with incomes up to 400% of the Federal Poverty Level, beginning in 2026. This initiative is vital for several reasons:

1. **Expanded Healthcare Options:** Although the VA provides high-quality, comprehensive health care, there are many reasons why veterans may not seek care from VA health facilities. Only 1 in 3 Oregon veterans are enrolled in federal VA health care. Still others are not qualified due to their type of discharge, or may not be comfortable seeking care due to past trauma. The Veterans Waiver Program will offer a non-VA healthcare option for veterans who either opt out of VA services or find them inadequate. This flexibility is essential in addressing the diverse healthcare needs of our veteran population.
2. **Closing the Coverage Gap:** Many veterans fall into a coverage gap where they don't qualify for VA services but also don't meet the criteria for the Oregon Health Plan. This bill will ensure that these veterans receive the medical care they need, including mental health and substance abuse treatment.
3. **Proactive Veteran Care:** By providing this additional healthcare option, we are taking a proactive approach to veteran care, potentially preventing more serious health issues and reducing long-term healthcare costs.

Although I am submitting testimony on behalf of myself as an individual, my perspective is rooted in my experience as a Native Oregonian who has spent his life in Oregon outside my eight years serving abroad in the US Army.

I am a Board Certified Fellow in the American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE) with 30 years of healthcare experience. My health care leadership and views are informed by my time as a leader at the Department of Veterans Affairs; as Deputy Director of the Multnomah County Health Department, Oregon's largest county public health department; as President of the Oregon Chapter of the American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE), a 501c(6) that serves one of the leading professional societies for healthcare leaders in our state and

internationally; and as President of Health Care for All Oregon (HCAO), a 501c(3) advocating to increase health care access for all Oregonians.

As a community member, as an Army veteran, and as someone who worked with veteran health care for 18 years at the Veterans Health Administration, I believe we have a responsibility to support those who have served our country. The Veterans Waiver Program represents a significant step towards fulfilling this obligation. It aligns with other veteran-focused initiatives in the current legislative session, such as HB 2538, which aims to improve healthcare providers' ability to support veterans through cultural competency training.

I urge you to support HB 2537 and help make comprehensive healthcare a reality for our low-income veterans. This bill is not just about providing medical assistance; it's about honoring our veterans' service and ensuring they have access to the care they need to lead healthy, productive lives.

I urge you to support this important legislation to protect the health and well-being of our veterans.

I implore you to please vote yes and support House Bill 2537. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Valdez G. Bravo, FACHE
US Army (1995-2003, OEF)
Lake Oswego, Oregon (HD-38, SD-19)