

Chairs, House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government and Veterans
900 Court St. NE, Room H-285
Salem, Oregon 97301

HB 4132

OCTVSOA supports Sections 1 through 3; Sections 5 through 10; Section 13 through 17.

OCTVSOA is neutral on Sections 18 through 21.

OCTVSOA Opposes

Section 4, the position of Employment Coordinator and

Section 11, Funding for CVSOs and the proposed amendments to ORS 406.462 governing the distribution of state funds for County Veterans' Service Offices (CVSOs).

Chair Tran and Members of the Committee:

My name is Tom Evans, and I am the Legislative Chair for the Oregon County and Tribal Veterans Service Officers Association (OCTVSOA). I am also a combat veteran of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as a Purple Heart and Bronze Star with Valor Recipient. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding HB4132

County Veterans' Service Offices are the front-line advocates for veterans in Oregon, providing direct, in-person assistance with federal and state benefits, claims development, and navigation of complex veterans' service systems. These offices are essential to ensuring veterans receive the benefits they have earned through service, and they operate in every county across the state, serving both urban and rural veteran populations. Over FY24, County Veteran Service Officers assisted with tens of thousands in disability and pension claims, resulting in 1.8 billion dollars in compensation for our veterans as well as over 142 million dollars in survivor's benefits.

Impact on Counties of All Sizes

While concerns about rural impacts are valid, it is important to emphasize that the reimbursement-based funding structure in this bill negatively affects counties of all sizes, including large and mid-sized counties. The amended process requires counties to expend funds first and seek reimbursement afterward, including staffing costs. This structure places strain on county budgets by requiring local funds to temporarily cover state-supported positions and operations, creating cash-flow challenges and fiscal uncertainty.

Counties must rely on predictable funding to maintain staffing continuity. When reimbursement is delayed or contingent upon quarterly reporting cycles, counties may be forced to defer hiring, leave vacancies unfilled, or absorb costs that were intended to be supported by state funding. These challenges are systemic and not limited to small or rural jurisdictions.

Staffing Challenges Across Oregon CVSOs

All County Veterans' Service Offices in Oregon are currently struggling to recruit and retain qualified staff due to limited and unstable funding. CVSO positions require specialized training to become accredited by the Federal VA which takes more than a year, then attending ongoing professional development and further training to effectively assist veterans with complex claims before the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Funding instability contributes directly to turnover, burnout, and prolonged vacancies, which in turn reduce service capacity and delay assistance to veterans.

Staffing disruptions have immediate downstream impacts on veterans, including longer wait times, reduced outreach, and delayed access to benefits. Because CVSOs are often the primary or sole point of contact for veterans seeking assistance, these impacts are detrimental to both Oregon Veterans and Oregon CVSOs and is felt quickly and broadly throughout the veteran community.

Equity and Service Access Considerations

By tying funding distribution to expenditures already made, the amended process risks reinforcing disparities between counties with differing fiscal capacities. Counties that experience staffing disruptions or budget constraints may be unable to expend funds at the levels required to receive full reimbursement, potentially reducing resources available for veteran services even where need remains high.

Use of Funds for Administrative Expansion

OCTVSOA also expresses concern about the amended funding process and any approach that would result in additional ODVA staffing or administrative expansion to manage the new funding rules. Any additional funding resources associated with implementation should be re-directed to counties to increase staffing, at the point where the services are delivered directly to veterans, rather than to increased administrative overhead at the state

level. We have seen that additional coordinator positions only serve as points of contact for veterans, and the veterans are referred back to CVSOs. This duplication of effort is unnecessary and diverts critical additional funding away from our counties.

For example, WorkSource Oregon already has veteran employment coordinators that are strategically positioned across the state to assist veterans with employment. These employment specialists are already connected within their regions and have the necessary connections with local employers to assist disabled veterans in returning to the workforce.

The additional Houseless Veteran Coordinator position is also unneeded. Currently, there are 7 SSVF (Supportive Services for Veterans and Families) programs across Oregon. These organizations, partnering with CVSOs are the front-line advocates for veterans experiencing housing insecurity. Again, the coordinator is only a liaison, primarily referring veterans back to their local counties or agencies for assistance.

Counties are best positioned to assess local veteran needs and deliver responsive services. Directing limited resources away from county operations risks weakening the front-line advocates that veterans rely upon most.

Conclusion

County Veterans' Service Offices are a critical component of Oregon's veterans' support infrastructure. Funding mechanisms should prioritize timeliness, predictability, and direct support for county operations, particularly staffing. While accountability is important, it must be balanced against the practical realities of service delivery and workforce stability.

I respectfully urge the committee to carefully consider how the amended distribution process affects CVSO staffing and operations; providing equitable access to services for veterans across all Oregon counties; and increasing ODVA support to CVSOs through increased funding, support for all Oregon CVSOs when they need it most.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued support of Oregon's veterans and Oregon County and Tribal Veterans Service Officers.

Sincerely,

Tom Evans

Sgt. USA (Ret)

OCTVSOA Legislative Chair