



WASHINGTON COUNTY

OREGON

Dear Chair Tran, Vice-Chairs Lewis and Watanabe:

My name is Zakir Khan, and I am a Government Relations Manager for Washington County. I'm here to testify in opposition of section 3, 4, and section 11 of HB 4132. This legislative concept creates more administrative positions at ODVA without investing in the direct services that assist veterans in getting these benefits. This bill also creates additional funding barriers to the counties who are already struggling to maintain core services. We take no position on other sections of the bill but submit this testimony to address ODVA administrative spending and the budgetary expectations of County programs to receive funding for critical veteran services. ODVA's process for these pass-through funds to support direct service operations is unrealistic and uneven.

Section 3: This section creates as many as twelve ODVA Positions without additional funding going to County and Tribal Veteran Service offices who provide direct services to veterans in their community. ODVA quantifies its success in part by the number of claims submitted or the amount of benefit dollars received as a measure of effectiveness. However, the Agency does not conduct direct claims case management, and the representation of veterans seeking these benefits is almost entirely done by County and Tribal Offices. The stated purpose of ODVA's current Coordinator positions is to enhance and expand partnerships, which we have found to be prioritized on outreach to external audiences. We advocate for any additional investment in staffing to be at the local level in direct services rather than additional statewide roles.

Section 4: This concept also creates a new position of Veterans Employment Coordinator. ODVA does not provide employment services, this role is within WorkSource Oregon in the form of Disabled Veteran Outreach Program (DVOP) representatives. It is a duplication of resources for ODVA to create a new position to assist veterans finding employment when that exact service is already provided by a different state agency. Additionally, it is unclear how a statewide coordinator would have the expertise to assist veterans with employment in their specific community. If the purpose of this new coordinator position is to refer veterans to Worksource where representatives conduct case management and have connections to businesses in that specific community, then this position is a duplication of services. If the Committee intends to invest in employment assistance, we contend a more impactful use of these funding resources would be in direct service helping veterans rather than a statewide coordinator position.

Section 11: Our veteran service office budget is 90% staffing cost. When we have funds unspent, it is due to staff vacancies. It can take multiple months to fill a position and any cost savings during this time is currently rolled over and used for additional outreach activities. In conversations with other veteran offices, it has become clear that not all offices are permitted to carry forward; some offices spend ODVA funding first and the remaining funds are swept back into County General Funds other offices carry forward unspent funds. Budgeting policies

and procedures are not uniform across all counties so this Section would disproportionately affect those without the ability to carry forward funds, without regard to the direct services they are providing for veterans and their families.

Many offices have carry forward because they are unable to fund an additional position, and their staff is already at capacity for providing additional services that might utilize the funds. At a minimum county should be allowed to spend ODVA funding before County Funds. The current process of providing a plan to use the money in the future should be continued if funds are not spent, to take ODVA funding back will only further strain resources in already stressed veteran programs in counties. Counties are in the best position to know what veterans in their community need. Washington County provides 82% of our Veteran Programs budget, we should be allowed to carry forward any unspent funds to enrich our program.

We propose that some, if not all, of the funds used to create additional positions at ODVA be redirected to County Offices to hire additional staff. With limited funds available to the state and local government, it is important to prioritize services which have the greatest impact on Oregon's veterans. The most direct way to ensure veterans access their earned VA benefits for financial, health, and education resources is to ensure there are VSOs in their community with the expertise and capacity to meet the growing need. The Agency has invested in coordinator positions to raise awareness about benefits and VSO services, and now it is time to invest in the people directly serving those veterans.

Thank you for your time.

Warmly,

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