

**HOUSE BILL 2212 TESTIMONY**  
**Committee on Veterans, Military ad Homeland Security**  
**By Ralph Snyder, Assistant Adjutant**  
**The American Legion Department of Kansas**  
**Tuesday, February 19, 2013**

Thank you for granting me the opportunity this morning to testify on behalf of House Bill 2212. My name is Ralph Snyder and I am the Assistant Adjutant and Legislative Chairman for The Kansas American Legion.

The American Legion supports 2212 because without it I am not certain how much longer our organization can continue participating as a partner with the state in the veterans claims assistance program.

Currently organizations participating in the veterans claims assistance program are required to provide equal or greater monetary support than the previous year. That requirement simply can not be sustained; just the simple act of replacing a computer can automatically raise our minimum base. Please note the requirement only includes monetary support; the statue does not give the American Legion any credit for providing the KCVA over half of our office space in the VA Regional office. That space complete with maintenance and security is worth approximately half of what we receive from the grant each year. In addition The American Legion provides the KCVA with a number of non

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monetary services through our volunteers, access and use of our Post Homes, training opportunities from our National Headquarters, and thousands of dollars in outright contributions and equipment to the Kansas Soldiers Home at Ft. Dodge and Kansas Veterans Home in Winfield.

Whenever the state lowers or underfunds its contribution to our partnership we are left to make up the difference with few options; actually only one. Realistically we cannot shorten the hours we are open; the demand for services is too great. Our agreement requires us to keep all three of our offices open and functioning therefore we can not make up a funding shortfall by closing an office. Besides as I have already mentioned, the demand for services is too great. That leaves us with two other options; reduce salaries or dip into our reserves. It is impracticable to reduce the salaries of our Veteran Service Representatives yet expect them to perform at the same level. If we tried to reduce salaries we would end up having to hire and train new employees. On average it takes five to seven years of training and practical experience before a Veterans Service Representative is fully competent; that is why the VA has such a large back log of cases. They constantly expand and contract the number of people employed who handle claims hence the main reason Veterans Service Organizations like The American Legion and VFW have had a presence in VA medical centers almost from the beginning when

the American Legion convinced Congress to establish the VA in 1930.

That has left us with only one real option; to dip into our reserves. Since 2010 we have had to dip into our Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation reserves for a total of \$172, 315.00. We cannot continue to chip away at the reserves it took us decades to build up because there isn't much left in those reserves. And each time we have had to dip into those reserves thereby increasing our monetary support we automatically raise our minimum contribution for the following year.

This year we will have to purchase at least four new computers in order to access the VA's latest change in IT programs; if we do not upgrade our computers once again we will be unable to access the VA's data bank, we won't be able to track claims, stay up to date with regard to policy or regulation changes which are in an almost constant flux. And just as soon as we purchase those computers we will again raise our minimum monetary contribution for 2014.

The American Legion implores to support the passage of HB 2212. If HB 2212 or something very similar is not passed during this legislative session it will push our organization closer to having to opt out of the Veterans Claims Assistance program. If that happens The American Legion will continue to serve as many

veterans as we can but at a minimum we'll have to lay off all Office Assistants and reduce our VSR staff by half. If the partnership between the State of Kansas and The American Legion is dissolved both of us will have failed, the KCVA will have to find its own office space for four of its employees in the Regional Office, but most of all veterans and their families will be the true losers.

Again thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. The American Legion urges your full support both in Committee and on the House Floor for the successful passage of HB 2212.