

Veterans, Military and Homeland Security

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB-2212

By Wayne Bollig, Veteran Services Director, Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs

Chairman Goico and members of the Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to come before you in support of HB-2212.

As Chairman of the Veterans Claims Advisory Board and Director of Veteran Services for the Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs (KCVA), I am privileged to come before you. The changes suggested by HB-2212 are essential in maintaining the involvement of our Veterans Claims Assistance Program (VCAP) partners. When K.S.A. 73-1234 was initially passed in 2006, all partners involved in its drafting (American Legion, VFW, and KCVA), recognized the strength in the VCAP partnership and sharing of responsibilities and cost. The VCAP concept works with the KCVA contributing funds for staffing and equipment, and the veteran service organizations (VSOs) contributing funds and support for appeals. The VSOs also provide equipment, space, and use of facilities for outreach. To ensure that both organizations of this partnership continued to contribute, it was agreed that the first year of the program would be a baseline year, and that the VSO would not contribute less than they did the previous year. The intent of the original Bill was clear; unfortunately it created an unintended issue for the service organizations by requiring them to maintain a level of match-funding equal to or greater than the previous year. The statutory language continues to set the bar higher for them. In addition, because of the language in the original Bill, if the service organizations increased their contribution, either to offset temporary or permanent reductions made by the state or to purchase one-time equipment, this raised the minimum level of match for the VSOs. This increase became permanent and the statute made it impossible for the VSOs or the KCVA to correct this issue. HB-2212, as written, gives the partners the opportunity to correct this problem.

In recent years, there have been occasions when the State elected to reduce the appropriation for the Grant Program and the service organizations, rather than make cuts in the program that would harm veterans by taking funding out of their operating reserves. We realize this was a hardship for them, and the KCVA Commission supports them in their efforts to get their appropriations back up to the current level, a level that would insure their continued participation in the Program. However, once they made the funding commitment, it became the new baseline. This new higher baseline has the potential to erode their reserves to a point they can no longer participate in the Grant Program. If this were to occur, the state would then have to absorb 100% of the cost of this program. This would include the services and assets provided by the service organizations as match; things like supporting the veterans' claim throughout the appeals process in Washington, DC (when necessary), annual training, and providing space in their posts for outreach and itinerant stops at no charge.

While this change has no fiscal impact on the way the Grant Program currently operates, it does give the KCVA and the VSOs the flexibility to set the program match to a level that would ensure continued participation. With legislative and service organizations' representation on the VCAP Advisory Board making recommendations to the Commission, who would then have final approval of match-funding levels, we ensure all partners maintain some level of involvement. The KCVA supports HB-2212 as written, and feel it goes a long way toward strengthening a great partnership that has been in effect for over 67 years.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I would be happy to stand for any questions.

Veteran/Military/Homeland Security Comm.

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