



1108 S. BROADWAY
LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS 66048
(913) 912-3459

JEFF PITTMAN

Feb 18, 2021

Chairman Clark and members of the Military & Veteran Affairs committee--

Thank you for making the time to have this hearing on HB2020. I appreciate this committee carrying the momentum we built late last session before COVID struck and reintroducing this bill. As you know, Veterans Organizations have made it clear that this is a top priority. Local constituents have made it clear this is a top priority. I rise in robust support for this bill and the companion funding component bill, HB 2021 and will do my part to build momentum in the Senate and Administration.

This bill merely directs the Kansas State administration to formerly make an application to be a part of the Federal VA cost-share program for a new veteran home in Northeast Kansas. When I created the original bills last year, I separated them into funding/bonding authority for the state, and into directing the state to apply to the Federal VA program for cost sharing --they will pay 65% of the cost. The bonding authority language is contained in SB 110 and HB 2020. HB 2020 has passed the House Appropriations and SB 110 had it's hearing pushed back a few weeks.

Kansas currently has just two veterans home and these are located in Ft Dodge and Winfield. Winfield was constructed in the 1940s and Ft Dodge is a collection of buildings that have grown old--ten dilapidated cottage style homes were demolished last year. Indeed, our current Kansas veteran homes are historic locations, yet they can be expensive and not purpose built in a way to be efficient to maintain. Surrounding states offers access to more homes and facilities. Studies have shown the concentration of veterans has shifted. A large majority of veterans live in Northeast Kansas, yet the two veteran homes in place are in the South and Southwest edges of our state.

In the Northeast area of our state, we have federally run VA facilities in Topeka, Wyandotte and Leavenworth. The director of Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs estimated in a hearing last year that many of the ongoing costs would pay for themselves due to reimbursement programs from Medicare, Medicaid and the VA. It just makes sense to take advantage of the VA cost-share program and at least start the process to have a purpose built modern facility with all the personnel efficiencies that brings.

Please support this effort to, at a minimum, get us on the federal VA Home list so we can start getting prioritized for a future new, purpose built, veterans home here in Kansas. Our vets deserve it.

Senator Jeff Pittman

Leavenworth, KS SD 5