

**Testimony
To
Ohio Senate
Finance Committee**

by

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AMVETS
Department of Ohio

On Behalf of
Veterans Organizations
receiving appropriations

FY 2012-2013
Budget

May 5, 2011

TESTIMONY OF GEORGE ONDICK
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Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, my name is George Ondick, Executive Director, for the AMVETS Department of Ohio.

In the interest of brevity, I have been asked to testify on behalf of the five major veteran's organizations and the other veteran's organizations that are recognized and accredited by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and those who wish to allow me to represent them. At the conclusion of my remarks I will be pleased to answer questions of the committee, as will representatives of the other organizations present today, should the committee wish to specifically address their organizations.

The business of Veterans in Ohio is big business with billions of dollars of federal funds coming into the state of Ohio annually. Large portions of these funds are generated through the direct efforts of the few organizations receiving an appropriation from the State of Ohio.

I am sure that nearly all the organizations for which I speak are experiencing similar problems. Through normal attrition we have lost a wealth of knowledge and experience. Our cost to train and provide continual education is an ever increasing drain on our budget, but a necessary expenditure; one that assures the leadership and professionalism that our veteran constituency deserves.

The introduction of the Court of Veterans Appeals (CVA) in 1990 has changed the way veterans organizations represent claimants. Each claim now has the potential of becoming a court case. We have to meet this challenge with professional staff, trained in preparing valid claims. Instead of having veterans law that changed once a year, we now face the possibility of daily law changes based upon case law as established by the Court of Veterans Appeals. The need for training on a more frequent basis is required.

In order to provide these services we must also continue to provide our veteran service officers with the necessary equipment to do their job such as computers, medical software, manuals, guides, law books and more.

The Veterans Service Organizations' cost of service is disproportionately higher than the State. At one time we shared an equal portion of the cost to provide Veterans services to the near one million veterans in Ohio and although we have received some increases in our appropriations over the years, they have not kept pace with the high cost of providing services. The increase of the aged veterans' population and the needs of the newest generation of veterans are but two examples of our increased workload for the Veterans Organizations. In time of war especially, we have a moral obligation to serve those who have defended our nation. All one needs to do is listen to the news – we as a country are making new veterans every day. These new veterans, who are protecting our way of life, deserve our services, they need our services, and we must be able to deliver quality services to them. When I say we, I mean the Veterans Service Organizations and our partner the State of Ohio.

The quality of service is a great concern to us as veterans' advocates. With overburdened staff, excessive workloads, and too little time to spend on individual claims, we fear veterans may receive less than what they are due.

A July 19, 2007 Associated Press story reported "Veterans who receive legal help or aid from advocacy groups receive an average \$11,162 compared with \$4,728 for those who go it alone." Our Veterans in Ohio need the representation they have earned and should not be subject to a lesser benefit for similar claims.

Please remember that dollars from veterans claims coming into Ohio are in the billions, over two billion in benefits in the last fiscal year. Considering the recipients of Ohio's veterans organizations efforts are often needy and disabled, the benefit dollars are used for basic necessities. Which are immediately infused into the state's economy, making our appropriations a very worthwhile investment of state funds. The billions of dollars brought into Ohio for the modest investment in veterans organization advocacy expertise may be the best bargain in the state budget.

We appreciate the fact that we did not have our appropriation reduced more than the 5% in the proposed budget. However, when you operate as a not for profit organization, every dollar counts and even a small percentage cut in an already strained budget could result in the loss of a service officer or support staff. This will directly affect the tax base in Ohio. I am hopeful the Senate will concur with the wisdom of the Ohio House of Representatives and keep the changes for the veterans organizations as listed in the Amendments Accepted in House Finance May 3, 2011 (copy attached)

In the State of Ohio Executive Budget Fiscal Years 2012 and 2013

Book One: The Budget Book Prepared by the Office of Budget and Management

Timothy S. Keen, Director. Under veterans organizations on page 596 the “**Role**

and Overview “ It was stated “Thirteen veterans' organizations, including the

Korean War Veterans, the Jewish War Veterans, the Catholic War Veterans, the

Military Order of the Purple Heart, the Vietnam Veterans of America, the

American Legion of Ohio, the AMVETS, the Disabled American Veterans, the

Marine Corps League, the 37th Division Veterans' Association, the Veterans of

Foreign Wars, the Army and Navy Union, U.S.A., and the American Ex-Prisoners

of War, receive a subsidy from the state to help veterans and their dependents

identify and claim benefits to which they are entitled. Each organization provides

services to its particular constituency. State funding supplements each

organization's other funding raised through membership dues, fund-raising efforts,

private donations, and federal grants”. This statement is incorrect. We do not limit

our services to our constituency, we provide our services to any eligible veteran.

Under the heading “The Executive Recommendation will fund the following

objectives:” It was stated the funds “Provide each organization with a subsidy to

support the needs of its membership”. Again this is incorrect; we don't support our

organizations with this appropriation. We utilize these funds to provide services to

all veterans of the state of Ohio.

I thank you for this opportunity to give testimony and I will be pleased to answer any questions the committee may have, as will the representatives of other veterans service organizations present.