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'Ohio Legislative Report'

Ohio Legislative Report

Is published electronically at the start of each month to report on the latest information about legislative issues taking place in Columbus that could affect the lives of Veterans, Military Personnel, and their families in Ohio.

It is emailed at no charge to all who would like to receive it.

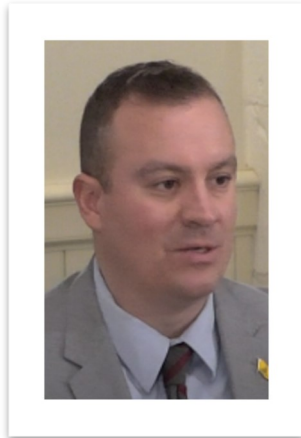
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Editor: David K. Root

Statehouse Happenings

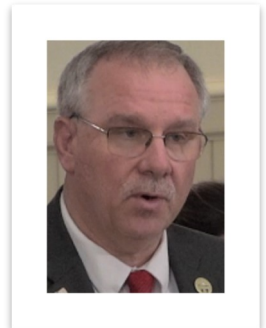
The number of committee hearings in December numbered much less than the previous month due mostly to the fact that the General Assembly began their winter break in mid-month. During the first half of the month, Tuesday the 5th was the busiest for veteran/military legislation.



Rep Swearingen testifies before the Transportation Committee

In the morning the House Transportation Committee heard sponsor testimony for House Bills 335 and 299. First Representative **D.J. Swearingen** (District 89) testified for his bill HB 335 which would designate a portion of State Route 163 in Ottawa County as the "Ottawa County Veterans Memorial Highway."

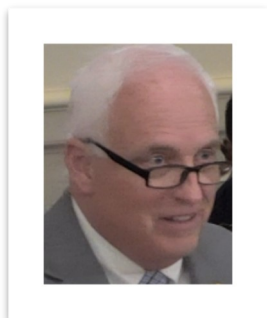
Following next was testimony from Representative **Don Jones** (District 95) sponsor of HB 299. His bill would designate a portion of State Route 7 in Washington County as the "Specialist Five Frederick Wayne Taylor Memorial



Rep Jones testifying before the Transportation Committee

Highway." SP5 Taylor was killed in action in Vietnam in 1968.

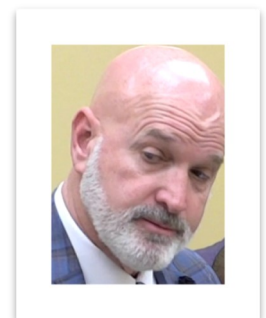
At the same time the Transportation Committee was conducting business, the House Homeland Security Committee was hearing sponsor testimony from Representative **Bernard Willis** (District 74) on House Concurrent Resolution 9. The resolution, sponsored by Representatives **Jennifer Gross** (District 45) and Willis would urge the US Congress to restore the Department of Defense's superior warfighting principles of recruiting,



Sen Johnson testifies before the Armed services Committee

assigning, training, promoting, and retaining personnel solely based on merit and ensuring such personnel maintain and display a warrior ethos and the resolution would be known as the "Restoration of America's Readiness (ROAR) Resolution."

In the afternoon the House Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committee heard testimony on Substitute Senate Bill 113 from Senator **Terry Johnson** (District 14). This was the first hearing on the house side. The bill was sponsored by former Senator **Frank Hoagland**, but Johnson testified at



Rep Willis testifies before the Homeland Security Committee

See Happenings on Page Seven...

BILLS & RESOLUTIONS INTRODUCED IN December

HB 350:

Introduced by Representatives **Jame Callender** (District 57) and **Daniel P. Troy** (District 23) on December 4th. It was referred to the House Transportation Committee.

The bill would enact section 5534.664 of the Revised Code to designate a portion of State Route 44 as the "Lance Corporal Austin B. Schwenk Memorial Highway."

HB 355:

Introduced by Representative **Thaddeus J Claggett** (District 68) on December 12th.

It was referred to the House Transportation Committee.

The bill would enact section 5534.671 of the Revised Code to designate State Route 161 in Licking County as the "Licking County Veterans Memorial Highway."

HB 365:

Introduced by Representative **Tim Barhorst** (District 85) on December 19th.

It has not been referred to a committee at this time.

The will would enact sections 5534.659 and 5534.667 of the Revised Code to designate a portion of US Route 65 in Champaign County "Army Corporal Charles E. Hiltbran Memorial Highway" and a portion of US Route 68 in Logan County "Army PFC Herbert S. Bechtel Memorial Highway."

SB 208:

Introduced by Senator **Kristina D Roegner** (District 27) on December 19th.

It has not been referred to a committee at this time.

The bill would amend section 3313.98 of the Revised Code to require a city, exempted village, or local school district to include in its open enrollment policy an exception for military children.

OUT IN THE DISTRICTS



State Rep Honors Hall of Fame Veteran

December 9, 2023

Pioneer, Ohio - Robert "Bob" Walkup (*center*), President and Founding Member of the Williams County Veterans Memorial was honored over the weekend with a special commendation from State Representative James M. Hoops (*left*). Walkup was inducted into the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame last month for his many years of dedicated service to veterans and his community. He is a Past Post Commander of Pioneer American Legion Post #307. Also pictured (*right*) is Pioneer Mayor, Edward Kidston.

Reflections

"It's time for political leaders across the ideological spectrum to realize that, while partisanship is understandable, hyper-partisanship is destructive to our country. We need more visionary leaders who will earnestly strive for bipartisanship and finding policy solutions that can move America forward."

-Martin Luther King III

WHAT OTHER STATES ARE DOING

Mass. Gov. Files Comprehensive Vet Legislative Package

In Massachusetts the governor as the primary sponsor can file a bill with the clerk of the House of Representatives and that is what Governor **Maura T. Healey** did. Just two days before Veterans Day Healey filed H4172, *An Act Honoring, Empowering and Recognizing Our Servicemembers and Veterans (HERO Act)*. It marks the first time in 20 years that a Massachusetts Governor has specifically introduced a comprehensive and expansive legislative package dedicated to the welfare of veterans.

According to a press release found on the state website, the Hero Act will have positive impacts for hundreds of thousands of veterans living in Massachusetts, including nearly 30,000 women veterans and thousands of LGBTQ+ veterans.

"Our veterans have sacrificed so much for our country, and this transformative legislation marks an important step toward ensuring that Massachusetts supports them in return," said Governor Healey in the release. "From day one, our administration has been committed to revitalizing veterans' services in Massachusetts and ensuring that every one of these heroes receives the benefits, resources and support that they deserve. I'm grateful to Secretary Santiago for his leadership of our state's first veterans' secretariat and look forward to collaboration with our legislative partners on this historic bill."

The HERO Act encompasses 17 spending, policy initiatives, tax credits, and statute changes organized into three categories:

Benefit Expansion

- **Expands access to Behavioral Health**

Treatment: Allows veterans to be reimbursed for visits to outpatient behavioral health providers.

- **Increases the Disabled Veteran Annuity:** Increases the annual annuity for veterans with a 100% service-connected disability, surviving spouses, or Gold Star Parents from \$2,000 to \$2,500.

- **Increases the Vet-Hire Tax Credit:** Increases to \$2,500 a tax credit for small businesses hiring chronically unemployed or low-income veterans. Eligible veterans include those receiving SNAP benefits, chronically unemployed veterans, and

unemployed service-connected disabled veterans.

- **Increases access to the Active-Duty Buyback program:** Lengthens the timeframe for veterans in public service to participate in the Active-Duty Service Buyback program and allows retroactive participation for veterans who missed the buyback opportunity. This program will enable veterans to purchase up to four years of active-duty service time toward their state retirement.

- **Prevents the "COLA Cliff":** Ensuring that a cost-of-living adjustment in Social Security benefits will not affect veterans' eligibility for Chapter 115 benefits in the middle of the state fiscal year.

- **Increases Local Flexibility for Veterans Property Tax Exemptions:** Creates two separate local options. The first allows municipalities to double the veteran property tax exemption without doubling all other exemption clauses. The second ties the annual property tax abatement amount to inflation, allowing exempted property tax amounts to increase with inflation.

Eliminates the Fee for Specialty License Plates for Veterans: Waives specialty license plate fees on specialty veteran license plates and creates a new woman veteran license plate decal.

Commitment to Inclusivity and Greater Representation

- **Broadens the Chapter 115 Definition of Veteran:** Aligns the state Chapter 115 program definition of a veteran with the United States Department of Veteran Affairs definition. This change allows more veterans to be eligible for annuity, Chapter 115 benefits, access to the Massachusetts Veterans Homes, and other state-provided benefits. This only applies to EOVS programs and does not affect any other agency or entity.

- **Expands the Scope of the Veterans Equality Review Board (VERB):** Expands the scope of the Board beyond 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' discharges to include discharges related to Military Sexual Trauma, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, mental health conditions, or HIV discharges.

- **Expands the definition of a veteran dependent:** Expanding the Chapter 115 definition of "dependent" to support more dependents based on the Family Court definition.

- **Updates Dependent Residency Requirements to**

See States on Page Six...

OPINION PAGE

READERS LETTERS

Good For Some, But Not For All

SB 134 while at first glance and quick read through sounds like a great bill. It discriminates against those

who became injured or ill from their time in service that weren't able to do a 20 or more year time in service, and those who have life-shortening illnesses from their time in service that are under 59 years old. It also makes it so those under 59, and 100% still get the \$50,000 off the true property value, until they turn 59. Those who have done 20 or more years of service (Active, Guard or Reserves) and those who are over 59 that aren't 100% from the VA would be able to get their VA rating percentage reduced from their true property value.

SO a veteran rated at 70% and is either 59 or had 20 or more years in service would get 70% reduced from their true property value. Meanwhile those veterans who aren't 59 or were unable to do 20 or more years, that aren't 100% would get no reductions until they turn 59.

The exemptions carry over to our surviving spouse (as long as they don't remarry). SO how is this fair to the surviving spouses of those who have died at a young age from their toxic exposures, their surviving spouse isn't able to apply until they turn 59 either. Heath Robinson died from his cancer at the age of

See *Letters* on Page Six...

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

OLR welcomes letters to the editor.

- * Letters are limited to 200 words.
- * Letters with over 200 words may be edited.
- * Letters will be subject to editing for accuracy, clarity, length, and taste.
- * Letters must include writer's name, address, and phone number for the purpose of verification.

EMAIL LETTERS TO: oh.leg.report@gmail.com

OUR OPINION

Let The System Work

Will the adage "Third time's a charm" hold true for State Representative **Joseph A. Miller, III** (District 53)? We hope so.

For the third time in as many General Assemblies, Miller has introduced a bill that would "designate the Honor and Remember flag as the symbol of Ohio's concern and commitment to honoring and remembering the lives of all fallen service members and their families." Each time it has been met with opposition by other lawmakers.

Miller and State Representative **Tracy M. Richardson** (District 86) sponsored HB 406 at the end of the first half of the 133rd G.A. and after three hearings, members of the House Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committee voted unanimously for favorable passage. It did not make it to the House floor for a vote.

Miller reintroduced the bill early in the 134th G.A. with former State Representative **Michael Sheehy** (District 46). Less than two months later HB 213 received a unanimous vote for favorable passage in the House Government Oversight Committee. On the house floor that same month, the bill passed with a vote of 96 to 0. It then went to the Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee and was never heard from again.

In March of this year Miller once again introduced his bill. This time with Representative **Adam C. Miller** (District 6) as his Cosponsor. The bill (HB 123) went right to the House State and Local Government Committee where it still awaits its first hearing.

HB 406 had 20 cosponsors when it died, HB 213 had 54 and HB 123 currently has 22. There has been no opposition testimony and has heard proponent testimony from VSOs, Gold Star Families, and others. There has not been one 'nay' vote. Democrats and republicans have been cosponsors as well as veterans and nonveterans.

It is past time for HB 213 to have hearings and

See *Opinion* on Page Six...

Legislation In The 135th Ohio General Assembly

Pertaining to Ohio Veterans, Active Duty, Reserve & National Guard, and Their Families

- ◇ HB 18 Allow military license plate applicant present county veterans ID
- ◇ HB 33 Establishes operating appropriations for fiscal years 2024-2025
- ◇ HB53 Authorize refundable tax credits for hiring certain veterans
- ◇ HB 57 Index the homestead exemption to inflation
- ◇ HB 60 Increase amount of and expand the homestead exemption
- ◇ HB 69 Revise membership of county veterans service commissions
- ◇ HB 90 Authorize property tax exemption for disabled veterans, spouses
- ◇ HB 123 Designate Honor and Remember flag to honor fallen service members
- ◇ HB 126 Expand municipal income tax exemption for military pay
- ◇ HB 131 Designate Army SSgt. Charles V. Kettler Memorial Highway
- ◇ HB 132 Designate Army Sgt. Herbert C. Linville Memorial Highway
- ◇ HB 133 Designate Army Sgt. Ronnie Blair Memorial Highway
- ◇ HB 150 Prohibit rental discrimination based on lawful source of income
- ◇ HB 202 Designate Specialist Dennis Alan Combs Memorial Highway
- ◇ HB 231 Establish 9-8-8 suicide prevention, mental health telephone line
- ◇ HB 242 Establish the Armed Forces Reserve Component Scholarship Program and related funds
- ◇ HB 250 Revise the Military Enlistment diploma seal
- ◇ HB 252 Designate SM1 Cornelius Anthony McCafferty, Jr. Memorial Highway
- ◇ HB 253 Designate Brigadier General Charles Young Memorial Historical Corridor
- ◇ HB 254 Expand and enhance the homestead property tax exemption for disabled veterans
- ◇ HB 269 Designate Sgt Bradley J. Harper USMC Memorial Highway
- ◇ HB 286 Designate Vienna Township Veterans Bridge
- ◇ HB 294 Designate Delaware County Veteran's Memorial Highway
- ◇ HB 299 Designate Specialist Five Frederick Wayne Taylor Memorial Highway
- ◇ HB 310 Regards STRS member purchase of military service credit
- ◇ HB 317 Designate Sgt. Cory M. Endlich Corridor
- ◇ HB 335 Designate Ottawa County Veterans Memorial Highway
- ◇ HB 350 Designate Lance Corporal Austin B. Schwenk Memorial Highway
- ◇ HB 355 Designate Licking County Veterans Memorial Highway
- ◇ HB 365 Designate multiple memorial highways
- ◇ HR 95 Urge Congress to extend GI Bill benefits
- ◇ HR 189 Honoring Thomas Mihalis Memorial Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1079 on its Centennial
- ◇ HR 221 Honoring Dan Shroyer as a 2023 National Veterans Golden Age Games Champion
- ◇ HR 222 Honoring Dr. John Eichelberger as a 2023 National Veterans Golden Age Games Champion
- ◇ HR 258 Honoring American Legion DeWitt McConnell Post 235 on its Centennial
- ◇ HR 302 Honoring Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1090 on its Centennial
- ◇ HR 316 Honoring Jay Wilson American Legion Post 112 on its Centennial
- ◇ HCR 8 To urge the federal government to select Ohio for the permanent headquarters of the United States Space Command
- ◇ HCR 9 Adopt Restoration of America's Readiness (ROAR) Resolution
- ◇ SB 12 Regards veteran-owned business enterprise certification program
- ◇ SB 14 Expand veteran eligibility to teach without license
- ◇ SB 15 Authorize Military License Plate Program permanent registration
- ◇ SB 43 Modify homestead exemption-surviving spouse of a disabled veteran
- ◇ SB 45 Designate Veterans Memorial Bridge in

See Legislation on Page Six...

States, from Page Two

Align with Current Practices: Updating dependent residency requirements to align with current practices.

Implements IVF Reimbursement for Same-Sex Couples

Denied Reimbursement by VA: Launching a pilot program to provide IVF reimbursement to affected veterans while establishing a working group to explore long-term solutions in response to the federal policy excluding same-sex couples.

Modernization of Veterans Services

- **Codifies Dental Assistance Benefits:** Ensuring veterans receive essential dental care by codifying dental benefits for Chapter 115 recipients.
- **Codifies Medical Assistance Benefits:** Providing consistent care to veterans by codifying medical assistance benefits.
- **Codifies Authority for Veterans Cemeteries:** Ensuring proper management and care of veterans cemeteries by codifying the authority for EOVS to continue administering and maintaining the state's two Memorial Veterans Cemeteries.
- **Modernizes statute language for inclusivity and standardization:** Revise Chapters 115 and 115A to ensure gender-neutral and inclusive language while removing antiquated references.

Initiates a Study on the Use of Alternative Therapies for Veteran Mental Health Disorders: Establishing a working group to study the potential benefits of alternative therapies, such as psilocybin, in treating veterans suffering from mental health disorders.

Opinion, from Page Four

be allowed to move through the legislative process. One or two lawmakers should not take it upon themselves to dictate their beliefs to the citizens of the state. Let the people be heard and let the legislators vote.

The Ohio Legislative Report thinks it is time to let the system to work the way it was designed to work.

SEND US YOUR PHOTOS

If you have news or photos of a state representative or senator doing veteran/military stuff in their district, send it to us.

Email photos and all info to:
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Letters, from Page Four

39, his widow is only 38, so she would have to wait until she turns 59 to get this exemption, if passed.

I believe this bill would be best IF they would amend it to remove the age and years of service requirement.

Andrea Neutzling, Sr. Vice Commander
Department of Ohio VFW, District 12

Legislation, from Page Five

- Trumbull County
- ◇ SB 63 Require plaintiff in asbestos claim to file specified disclosures
 - ◇ SB 64 Expand Ohio National Guard Scholarship Program
 - ◇ SB 110 Designate Sgt. Anthony Kress Vinnedge Memorial Highway
 - ◇ SB 113 Regards failure to comply with Military Selective Service System
 - ◇ SB 114 Designate Lance Corporal James F. Kimple Memorial Highway
 - ◇ SB 152 Designate Cpl. Jack O. McClure Memorial Highway
 - ◇ SB 154 Include Space Force in armed forces, armed and uniformed service
 - ◇ SB 167 Designate Marine Corporal Tim W. Russell Highway
 - ◇ SB 169 Designate Cortland Veterans Memorial Bridge
 - ◇ SB 183 Designate Lance Corporal James Patrick Rizzo Memorial Highway
 - ◇ SB 191 Designate PFC Richard 'Rick' Wesley McFarland Memorial Highway
 - ◇ SB 208 To require a military exception in an open enrollment policy
 - ◇ SR 171 Honoring Thomas Mihalis Memorial Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1079 as it commemorates its One Hundredth Anniversary
 - ◇ SCR 8 Urge federal govt reduce processing time-veteran disability claim
 - ◇ SCR 9 Urge Congress support military, veteran mental health treatment

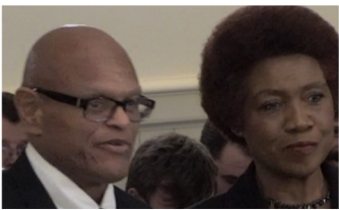
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Happenings, from Page One

Hoagland's request because he had resigned from office effective December 1st. Sub SB 113 would prohibit a person who fails to comply with the Military Selective Service System from holding certain public offices or employment with the state and would require high schools to notify students of any obligation to register for the Selective Service System. It passed on the senate floor in October with a 26 to 4 vote.

The committee then spent the next two- and one-half hours listening to testimony on House Bill 69.

Bill sponsors are Representative **Brian Stewart** (District 12) and **Bernard Willis** (District 74). As written, HB 69 would require county veterans service commissions to include two members who served in the military after



Alger and June Cable gave proponent testimony on HB 69

September 11, 2001, and require one member of the commission to be appointed by the board of county commissioners. However, Willis stated before the hearing that the bill had been amended

to no longer require one member to be appointed by the board of county commissioners and to require only one member who served after 9-11.

Proponent testimony was heard from three individuals followed by opponent testimony from seventeen individuals representing twelve different

organizations. This was the third hearing for HB 69.

Later in the afternoon the House Ways and Means Committee brought forth House Bill 254 for a third hearing. The committee had no opponent

testimony submitted beforehand and there was no one in attendance to offer opposition to the bill. HB 254 is sponsored by Representatives **Tracy M. Richardson** (District 86) and **Adam Holmes** (District 97). The bill would expand and enhance the homestead property tax exemption for disabled veterans.

The next week on Tuesday the 12th, the House Pensions Committee heard proponent testimony from one individual on House Bill 310 which would amend the Ohio Revised Code regarding purchases of military service credit by State Teachers Retirement System members. The bill is sponsored by Representative **Don Jones** (District 95) and after three hearings has not heard any opponent testimony.

No other veteran/military legislation had a hearing before the break when the legislators went home to be with families for the holidays. They will be back to business-as-usual in the third week of January.

OHIO CONSTITUTION

ARTICLE I, BILL OF RIGHTS

SECTION #9 BAIL

Effective: 2022

All persons shall be bailable by sufficient sureties, except for a person who is charged with a capital offense where the proof is evident or the presumption great, and except for a person who is charged with a felony where the proof is evident or the presumption great and where the person poses a substantial risk of serious physical harm to any person or to the community. Where a person is charged with any offense for which the person may be incarcerated, the court may determine at any time the type, amount, and conditions of bail. Excessive bail shall not be required; nor excessive fines imposed; nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted. When determining the amount of bail, the court shall consider public safety, including the seriousness of the offense, and a person's criminal record, the likelihood a person will return to court, and any other factor the general assembly may prescribe.

The general assembly shall fix by law standards to determine whether a person who is charged with a felony where the proof is evident or the presumption great poses a substantial risk of serious physical harm to any person or to the community.