

Testimony on March 12, 2013 - 10:30 a.m.

Senate Committee on Federal and State Affairs

House Bill 2212

Chairman Ostmeyer, Vice Chairman Emler, ranking minority member Faust-Goudeau, and Representatives Holland, Holmes, LaTurner, Longbine, Olson, and Tyson.

Thank You for allowing the Kansas Veterans of Foreign Wars, VFW, to testify today in strong support of HB 2212.

Please, allow me to give you a little background on HB 2212.

In the early and mid 2000's, declining membership in Veteran Service Organizations was causing a growing concern as to whether they could continue to have Service Officers to assist veterans file claims and assist them at their hearings when they filed an appeal after the claim had been denied.

The leadership of the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Kansas contacted the Kansas legislature to see if the legislature

could assist the service organizations keep and improve their Service Officer situation.

Freshman Senator Ralph Ostmeyer, he had served five years as a Representative, and Representatives Ruff and Tafenelli took the ball and ran. With the assistance of other Senators and Representatives the Veterans Claims Assistance Program was born and went into effect in August of 2006.

Although all veterans service organizations were invited to participate, only the American Legion and the VFW chose to do so. The original bill allowed for \$500,000.00 to be split equally between the two organizations. In July of 2011, the Kansas Legislature appropriated \$467,268.00 to be split between the two service organizations. In the Spring of 2012 it was restored to the original amount. The Legislature appropriated \$576,000.00 for the 2012-13 year. This was divided per the request of each service organization and the VFW was awarded \$276,000.00 and the American Legion was awarded \$300,000.00.

The money appropriated for the VFW is used to pay for four service officers, three office assistants, and one part-time office assistant, plus needed equipment and office supplies necessary to accomplish the task of filing claims for veterans.

If the claim is denied and the claimant wishes to appeal, then the service officer assists him and will present his appeal if so desired by the claimant

The base salary for a VFW service officer is \$32,500 and the base salary for an office assistant is \$21,500.00. Then, when you factor in \$479.00 per month per person for insurance and \$757.68 total for retirement benefits per month; this comes to \$249,576.00 without factoring in the part-time worker. This does not leave much left for equipment and supplies. With the volatility of the economy it is impossible to give raises, so, bonuses are given when the budget allows.

The statute does state that the VFW will have two service officers at Wichita, and one each at Topeka and Leavenworth.

So far in the first seven months of this fiscal year the VFW Service Officers have helped veteran claimants receive \$10,466,769.00 in back pay and \$1,883,855.00 in monthly compensation.

The Veteran Service Organizations did not expect a total handout when they approached the legislature for help; so matching funds were added in the bill. These are a total of cash expended in excess of the amount allotted

plus expenditures in kind that could be attributed and verified to assist the vso's in this program. It states that each year the vso's have to meet or beat their individual match from the previous year. The matches are growing at a rapid rate and are causing a growing concern that this will soon, if not already, will become a major financial burden. Spending money just to fulfill a contract is counterproductive to our organizations. A set percentage as is suggested in House Bill 2212 would alleviate most of the anxiety that is now being experienced. As you can see on the back two pages are copies of one of last years amended contract reimbursement forms and one of this year's reimbursement forms. If you look at the highlighted areas you will see the amount of that year's matching funds needed. If you look at this year's form, you will see that at this time we are setting in good shape, but that could change rapidly for next year. These are some of the reasons that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the Department of Kansas ask that you consider and pass House Bill 2212.

I would also like to add, that a few weeks ago an article that made major headlines told about the 'Seal Team 6' member that supposedly shot Bin Laden. He has now been transitioned out of the military and there is no legal work for him if he follows what he was trained to do!

This is a prime example of the returning comrades that our Service Officers assist, by helping them understand their entitled benefits, filing claims for service connected disabilities, and assisting them in where to go to get training for a civilian job.

I sincerely "Thank You" for your time and would welcome questions if you have them.

**Prepared and Presented by
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