

CDR Michelle M. Bleth-Weber, BS, MHA, MSQSM  
United States Public Health Service  
P.O. Box 315  
Grand Ronde, OR 97347-0315  
(971) 237-6324 - H  
(503) 843-6448 - W

July 28, 2016

The Honorable Richard Devlin  
Senate  
State of Oregon  
Salem, OR

The Honorable Ann Lininger  
House of Representatives  
State of Oregon  
Salem, OR

Dear Senator Devlin and Representative Lininger:

It is a great honor to submit this request for your consideration on behalf of Dr. James Gaudino and other USPHS Commissioned Corps officers serving in the great State of Oregon. This is a request for review and changing the verbiage of Oregon law that only allows former members of the "armed forces" to be allowed to pay into the Oregon Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS). As you are aware, there are seven federal uniformed services in which 5 of the 7 are considered armed forces while the remaining two are the Commissioned Corps of the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Corps of Officers (NOAA Corps).

The members of these uniformed services are completely analogous to those who serve in the armed forces of our country. We are analogous because we wear military uniforms, receive military pay and allowances, access military installations for commissaries and exchanges, qualify for TRICARE healthcare coverage, and are considered Veterans by the United States Government for all programs administered by the United States Department of Veteran's Affairs.

We are our country's first-line of defense against disease and disasters brought on by natural and manmade causes. We deploy in the event of hurricanes and other disasters, including Katrina, Rita and Sandy. We have had several thousand officers deploy in the aftermath of manmade tragedies such as the Newtown, CT shootings, when USPHS mental health teams went into the community and provided counseling services, we have deployed with U.S. military forces to both Iraq and Afghanistan; and we provide all the healthcare to the United States Coast Guard and to the officer corps of NOAA. We also deployed to Liberia, where we were the only U.S. government healthcare workers who actually risked our lives treating Ebola patients. We are indistinguishable from members of the U.S. armed forces, except we wear a different set of uniforms.

When we are not deployed we can be found serving in the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Federal Drug Administration (FDA), the Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP), Indian Health Service (IHS) - just to name a few. We are America's Health Responders. The roots of our history and the importance of our work date back more than 200 years, but we seem to be forgotten in the state and federal legislatures when laws are written. We are eager to be "seven branches of the uniformed services - serving our Great Nation, indistinguishable from our service brothers and sisters in uniform."

Sincerely,



CDR Michelle M. Bleth-Weber, USPHS