

Testimony to the House Veterans and Emergency Management Committee

HB 2139 Establishing a Rural Veterans Healthcare Transportation Grant Program within Department of Veterans' Affairs

Position: **Favorable**

January 26, 2021

The Honorable Paul Evans, Chair

House Veterans and Emergency Management Committee

CC: Honorable Members of the House Veterans and Emergency Management Committee

My name is Marco Oswald, and I am a military veteran with 33 years of service with the United States Army. I am a resident of Sweet Home, Oregon, and submit this testimony as the Legislative Committee Vice-Chair representing the United Veterans' Groups of Oregon (UVGO). The UVGO represents the unanimous position of 13 major Veterans' organizations in Oregon. UVGO membership is listed at the end of this testimony.

The United Veterans' Group of Oregon (UVGO) strongly supports HB 2139.

The Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA) proposes to establish a program that will provide grants to entities in order to transport Veterans in rural areas in order to access services for physical, mental or behavioral health care.

HB 2139 seeks to level the playing field among Oregon's 300,000+ Veterans. Many Veterans live in areas well beyond major populations centers where ODVA services are located. Providing transportation to veterans in rural areas to access services for physical, mental or behavioral health care will promote equal access to critical services and enhance the quality of life for our remotely located Veterans, who may not possess the means for private transportation. Importantly, federally recognized Indian tribes in Oregon are eligible to receive grants under this section.

On behalf of the United Veterans' Groups of Oregon and our state's Veterans, the UVGO urges the committee to support HB 2139 and the benefits it will bring to our Veterans.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide the UVGO position on this important legislative issue.

Membership in United Veterans' Groups of Oregon: Air Force Association; American Legion; Association of the United States Army; Disabled American Veterans; Korean War Veterans' Association; Military Officers Association of America; Military Order of the Purple Heart; National Association of Atomic and Nuclear Veterans, Inc.; Non-Commissioned Officers

Association; Paralyzed Veterans of America; Veterans of Foreign Wars, Vietnam Veterans of America; and 40+8.