



United Veterans' Groups of Oregon (UVGO)
"In Service to Oregon's Military Veterans and Their Families"

The Honorable Representative Thuy Tran
The Honorable Representative Dacia Graber
The Honorable Representative Rick Lewis
Chairs, House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government and Veterans
900 Court St. NE, Room H-285
Salem, Oregon 97301

1 April 2025

Testimony in Support of HB 2845 on Behalf of the United Veterans' Groups of Oregon

Subject: **House Bill (HB) 2845:**

- Makes ODVA create more positions and hire staff. Makes ODVA create pilot programs on suicide prevention and workforce training. Makes ODOT accept an ID issued by USDOD or USDVA. (Flesch Readability Score: 65.7).
- Requires an appropriation to the Department of Veterans' Affairs from the General Fund to be in an amount not less than \$10,000,000 in 2015 dollars, adjusted for inflation.
- Requires the Director of Veterans' Affairs to add additional full-time positions within the department.
- Allows the director to appoint a deputy director, subject to approval by the Governor. Requires the director and deputy director to be a veteran who has received a discharge or release under other than dishonorable conditions.
- Directs the department to develop and implement one or more pilot programs for suicide prevention and workforce training and preparation. Allows moneys in the Veterans' Services Fund to be used for the pilot programs.
- Requires the Department of Transportation to accept, for issuing a driver license, an identification card issued by the United States Department of Defense or the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

Position on Measure: **Support**

Dear Chair Tran and Co-Chairs Graber and Lewis,

As the Chair of the United Veterans' Groups of Oregon (UVGO), I wish to thank you and the members of the Committee for your service to the State of Oregon, and for your steadfast dedication to improving the lives of Oregon's Veterans. The UVGO represents and advocates on behalf of 14 major Veterans groups in Oregon, serving more than 200,000 Veteran residents. I wish to assure you that when we advocate or communicate with your Committee, the position presented represents the unanimous view of our 14 Veterans' organizations in Oregon, with thoughtful consideration to the best interests of all Veterans in our great State.

The UVGO strongly supports HB2845. The bill is an omnibus of more than a dozen legislative initiatives to strengthen Veterans' rights and benefits, ensure adequate funding, and add operational resiliency to the core programs of the Oregon Department of Veteran's Affairs (ODVA). Significantly, in the current uncertain fiscal and federal policy environment, HB2845 lays out short and long-term strategies to address key focus areas that are UVGO priorities for this legislative session. HB2845 will provide ODVA with increased capacity to address Veterans' homelessness and suicide reduction; advocacy for incarcerated Veterans; and additional education, health, and women Veterans' coordinators. HB2845 also expands the implementation of Veterans' Courts, which are proving to be successful and cost-effective, to distant Oregon counties. Another provision helps close unintended loopholes that leave Veterans vulnerable to financial fraud.

Under normal circumstances, we might expect smaller bites of individual legislation to address each of these priority areas. However, we are experiencing a perfect storm of fiscal uncertainty, societal change, and accelerating governmental reform that calls for bold action to proactively combat particular harms that Veterans encounter as a result of their service to the Nation. Despite being a state that respects and honors its Veterans, the scourge of suicide and homelessness disproportionately afflicts Oregon Veterans. HB2845 will provide ODVA with depth and range to develop and implement new pilot programs and strategies to ensure Oregon Veterans have better access to treatment and resources. The bill will undoubtedly save lives and help Veterans reintegrate and become independent, contributing members of our Oregon communities.

In the current volatile fiscal environment, every bill is critically adjudged by its cost to taxpayers. While the full fiscal impact of HB2845 is yet to be determined, the bill seeks to responsibly manage any additional fiscal burden. It mandates that the Veterans Services Fund (funded by lottery dollars) hold a reserve of no more than 12% (similar to other reserve funds established from lottery proceeds). This reduction from the current mandate of 16% will immediately make available up to \$800K to help fund implementation of the new programs and employees envisioned in the bill. HB2845 establishes the goal that ODVA receive an appropriation from the General Fund in an amount not less than \$10,000,000 in 2015 dollars, adjusted for inflation. This provision enshrines the will of Oregon voters, who in 2016 flocked to the polls to mandate that 1.5% of Lottery proceeds be dedicated to support Veteran services, a cause uniting 84% of voters.

HB2845 swings big for the bleachers, but seeks to proactively address the turbulence Veterans may encounter as Federal funding becomes uncertain in our new political landscape. It is well supported in the Veterans' Caucus and our UVGO membership believes the bill is achievable. Enactment of HB2845 will demonstrate that Oregon values the selfless service of Veterans, and wants to provide every opportunity for Veterans to be contributing and productive residents of our State. Thank you for this opportunity to provide the UVGO position on this important legislative issue.

On behalf of the United Veterans' Groups of Oregon and our state's Veterans, the UVGO urges the committee to support HB2845 and the stability it will bring to our State and to our Veterans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary J. Mayer".

MARY J. MAYER, Colonel, USAF (Ret)
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The United Veterans' Groups of Oregon Membership Includes: Air & Space Forces Association; American Legion; Association of the United States Army; Disabled American Veterans; Gold Star Wives of America, Inc.; Korean War Veterans' Association; Marine Corps League; Military Officers Association of America; Military Order of the Purple Heart; Non-Commissioned Officers Association; Paralyzed Veterans of America Tri-State Chapter; Veterans of Foreign Wars, Vietnam Veterans of America; and 40+8.