

Good afternoon, Chair Conlin, and members of the Committee. I first want to thank you for the opportunity to speak before this Committee, and for all your work, time, and efforts to support our Military and Veterans. I would also like to thank the sponsors of these bills particularly Representative Morse, Representative Bezotte, Representative Brabec and Representative Bruck. I hope you would forgive me if I pronounced your name wrong. While Representative Bezotte bill is not on the agenda today, we do understand that from what I saw online all four of these bills are Tie Bar bills. I would like to address them all at one time if the Chair will let me do so. I should also say today I am not only addressing you as the Legislative Chair for the American Legion Department of Michigan I am also passing along some information and concerns brought to my attention from the Michigan Veteran's Coalition.

We are all in support of efforts to assist Veterans and our Michigan National Guard members that may be suffering from Mental Health issues. Our support does not stop at the door, so we do encourage expansion of training of anyone who may encounter members that may be suffering from these issues.

The issues that must be considered with this expansion of training are as follows:

1. If this becomes mandatory for our Veteran Service officers, it could impact their primary function and move our service officers away from that requirement. So as of this hearing we do not support making these mandatory programs as it relates to the Michigan Veterans Coalition service officers.
2. These programs could affect the efforts to get more Veterans the Benefits they are entitled to from the Federal V.A. if they were to become a mandatory in law requirement. This would reduce the funding coming to this State for our Veteran's.

I want to make it clear we are very supportive of the concepts in these bills but would like the bill sponsors and this committee to understand that Michigan Veteran Service Officers are already under a great restraint of their time, efforts, and resources. And while I am not able to speak on behalf of

the County Veteran Service Officer program, I would think that they are also under a great restraint of their time.

The Michigan Veteran Coalition Service Officer Program does work with Veterans who are suffering from a mental Health crisis almost daily.

Currently the Coalition Service Officers work closely with the Veteran Navigator program to have them service these veterans in need. This is a program that we hope the bill sponsors and the MVAA will also look to assist our Military and Veterans in a Mental Health situation.

Our Coalition Service Program does support more training in these areas, but we would like this committee and the MVAA to understand that the program and its service officers are under great pressure for their time and resources. The program has suffered a loss of over \$200,000.00 as of this year because the Coalition must give back funds to the MVAA so they can oversee the Coalition Service Officer program.

So, in closing I want to make it very clear we support these efforts to help our Military and Veterans. We would hope that this committee, the bill's sponsors and the MVAA would sit down with our Michigan Veteran Coalition Service Officer directors and work on the logistics of how these programs will work and the Coalitions involvement in these programs.

Thank you again for your time and consideration today and if the Chair wishes I am willing to answer questions.

Respectfully

Tim Poxson

American Legion Department of Michigan Legislative Chair