

Good morning Chair Robinson and Committee members, thank you for this opportunity to address this committee.

I am Tim Poxson the Legislative Chair for the American Legion Dept. of Michigan. Most of you have met me in the past. I am here today to support the budget request of the Department of Military and Veterans. I would also like to give you a little budget history for the Grant program the Michigan Veteran Affairs Agency oversees for use by the Michigan Veteran's Coalition and the County Veteran Service Officer Program.

The Michigan Veteran's Coalition that includes the American Legion the VFW the Disabled Veterans and Vietnam Veterans of America service organizations with the assistance of Grant money from the State of Michigan employs 70 VA-Accredited Veteran Service Officers; and those service officers, in partnership with Michigan Veteran Affairs Agency and County Veteran service officers' program that has 190 Service Officers in all but four Counties. Working together these programs assist Veterans on matters of their claims to the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs. The 2023-2024 fiscal year, the Michigan Veteran Coalition assisted Michigan Veterans in claiming \$1.2 **Billion** in new and additional financial, health, and educational benefits. A return on investment is 299% with \$4.1 **million** invested and returning \$1.2 **billion**. Money that is spent in this State by Veterans receiving these Federal funds.

The budget for Veteran Services Grant, twenty years ago, was just over \$3.9 **million**, today that budget has not increased by very much, to about \$4.1**million**.

The State budget in 2003-2004 was \$39.3 **Billion**, and the current State budget for 2024-2025 is \$82.5 **Billion**, an increase of 109%. The State budget has increased at more than the rate of inflation over the past 20 years. However, the Veteran Services Grants has not even kept up with the rate of inflation.

The bureaucracy of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs causes Veterans not to seek the benefits they have earned through their service, and the Michigan Veterans Coalition provides Michigan Veterans services to **Not Face the VA Alone**. This brings to the State of Michigan Veterans the financial, health, and educational benefits that contribute to local, county, and state economies and veteran stability.

The Veterans of previous wars and conflicts are growing older and are seeking help from the VA regularly and it is not the job of the US Department of Veteran Affairs to assist Veterans in applying for benefits. If we were trying to keep up with the cost of inflation alone we would be asking for the Michigan House and Senate Leadership, Appropriations Committee, and respected Military and Veteran Affairs Committees to increase the Veteran Service Grants to just over \$6.4 million to cover the costs of inflation over twenty-years, however we are only asking and supporting the requested increase to \$5.1 million to cover the cost of the grant program. We are also requesting that that the Michigan Veteran Affairs Agency and the Department of Military and Veteran Affairs are not permitted to reduce that amount for any internal expenses they may have with overseeing the Grant program. In

2023-2024 budget years they have taken to the tune of about **four hundred thousand** from the Grant program, creating a revenue shortage for the county veteran service officer program and the Michigan Veteran Coalition service officer program. The Michigan Veteran Coalition has had to reduce staff and take funding from other programs the four non-profits operate to assist veterans to keep the service officer program going at an acceptable level. Please do not allow this to continue.

Respectfully Tim Poxson

American Legion

Department of Michigan

Legislative Chair