

APPENDIX



Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of New Jersey

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My name is Ken Hagemann, a resident of Tuckerton representing the 1.6 million members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

It is time for NJ to stop classifying veterans, get in line with the 49 other states and grant every veteran, without regard of dates of service, the same benefits and opportunities. The current definition of what is a veteran is confusing for the veteran or family members, they often question are they covered under Title 11, Title 43, the State Constitution, or Even Title 39. They are unsure which state benefits they are eligible for which ultimately results in veterans not taking advantage of the property tax savings or worse, being left behind in PTSD treatments, homelessness assistance and other health or quality of life options.

We all have been talking about this for decades. I know how long this issue has dragged on because I was working with then State Senator McGreevey in the 90s to get this legislation passed. It is long past time to get it done.

Today less than a half percent of the U.S. population are serving in uniform. These brave men and women will spend more time on overseas deployments than previous veterans but unfortunately not all deployments will classify them as "veterans" for certain New Jersey benefits. With a reduced force the increased training and deployment tempo is very stressful on family life, reduced employment opportunities for Guard and Reserve troops and reduced education opportunities. Today's all volunteer force have put their and their families lives on hold to serve a greater good, and that service should be recognized.

It is often said that military service changes everyone. As someone in the veteran advocacy business I can tell you that is true. Some of those changes such as leadership traits learned, self-discipline instilled, and a sense of duty are beneficial for the veteran, our community, and our country, but many changes are not. The severity and prevalence of injuries suffered by veterans, both from training and combat, are not found in any other profession. I recently toured the War Related Injury Center with Congressman Kim where I learned from the staff that every veteran they evaluate has an enlarged aorta, but couldn't explain a medical reason for the condition. The Veterans Administration reports that veterans are twice as likely to commit suicide and in 2017 there were 919 suicides among never federally activated former National Guard and Reserve members. Those 919 veterans would not be considered a veteran in New Jersey and precluded from state benefits which would have improved their health and quality of life and possibly saved their lives.

As you have heard me testify before, I served as a Marine Corps Scout/Sniper in combat operations in the middle east during the late 1980s against Iranian armed forces. Despite having earned a Combat Action Ribbon along with other awards I was shocked to learn that my home state did not consider me a

veteran. What is tragic is the fact that our state does not consider the 39 men killed in action, nor the 37 wounded in action, in the operations I participated in, to be veterans. Their service and sacrifice mean nothing here in NJ. All because of some arbitrary dates designated by a long-ago bureaucrat or legislator.

Money shouldn't be used as a roadblock or an excuse to not vote yes on this issue, there is always enough money flowing out of this building for pet projects, to reward constituents and voter blocks, or free college. Unfortunately, the huge numbers of brave WW II veterans who benefited from the tax break are no longer with us. The military has downsized, and wars are fought with less personnel who endure numerous deployments. Every year the veteran population decreases by 3.72 % and in 21 years New Jersey's veteran population will have been reduced to a third of what it is today. New Jersey's homeownership is among the lowest in the country, and for post 9/11 veterans it stands at 51% vs a civilian homeownership rate of 62%. We should be giving our veterans every opportunity to own a home and stay right here in NJ. If this bill were passed today, there will be less veterans receiving this tax break today than when it was originally granted. Additionally, when this break was granted \$ 250.00 in a family's pocket went a whole lot further than it does today. We are not asking for a raise in the tax exemption, we are asking that NJ honor all of our veterans service equally.

We should all be thankful that everyday residents of this state voluntarily enter military service knowing the hardships they will endure, the family separations and as a Nation at war, the increased possibility of serious injury or death. As a state we need to honor veterans and their families, regardless when and where they served, thank them for their sacrifices and putting their lives on hold. Let's put the American veteran first, reward them for their service and sacrifice, and get this bill passed.

Ken Hagemann

State Adjutant, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States

About the VFW: The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. is the nation's largest and oldest major war veterans organization. Founded in 1899, the congressionally-chartered VFW is comprised entirely of eligible veterans and military service members from the active, Guard and Reserve forces. With more than 1.6 million VFW and Auxiliary members located in 6,200 Posts worldwide, the nonprofit veterans service organization is proud to proclaim "NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS" than the VFW, which is dedicated to veterans' service, legislative advocacy, and military and community service programs. For more information or to join, visit our website at vfw.org.