

# HB 556, HD2

**Measure Title:**

RELATING TO VETERAN BURIAL GRANTS

**Report Title:**

Veterans Cemetery; Filipino Veterans

**Description:**

Requires Office of Veterans' Services to make burial grant payments for burial costs and for transportation to the Philippines of the remains of a deceased veteran who joined the New Filipino Scouts between 10/06/1945 and 06/30/1947 and died after 06/30/2004.

Appropriates funds. (HB556 HD2)

STATE OF HAWAII  
OFFICE OF VETERANS SERVICES  
TESTIMONY ON H.B. 556, HD 2, RELATING TO VETERAN BURIAL GRANTS

SENATE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC  
SAFETY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS

MARCH 24, 2009

Good afternoon Chair Will Espero, Vice-Chair Robert Bunda, and members of the Senate Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs.

I am Mark Moses, Director of the Office of Veterans Services (OVS). We strongly oppose HB 556, HD 2, which requires the office of veterans' services to pay directly to a mortuary for services and to transport the remains of a deceased veteran who joined the New Filipino scouts between 10/06/1945, and 06/30/1947, and died after 06/30/2004, to the Philippines upon submission of an unpaid invoice.

The implementation of this measure would impact or replace the priorities set forth in the Executive Biennium Budget for Fiscal Years 2009-2010.

Our concerns with this measure are: It provides a benefit to this group of veterans that is not provided to any other group of veterans, including residents of Hawaii and other allies who fought alongside America's forces. Should a resident of Hawaii pass while visiting another island, this veteran's remains are not eligible to be transported to their home community or elsewhere, and the family or estate is responsible for any and all costs associated with such transport. This includes transportation from place of death to a funeral home, and to a cemetery. As approximately 1000 veterans pass each year in Hawaii, we believe that this measure may place the State in a position to defend itself against claims of discrimination, or create significant cost if applied to all veterans.

Should this measure pass, the OVS will be compelled to complete the rulemaking process once again. We have just promulgated rules concerning burial of Filipino WWII veterans at a cost of nearly \$6,000. The OVS elected to hold hearings within each county because the widows of these Filipino veterans did not have funds to travel to Oahu and required interpreters at the hearings. Given our current economic circumstances, it may not be practical to implement this measure, especially since it grants benefits to only one group of veterans.

Thank you for allowing me to present the Veterans' perspective on this issue. I will respond to any questions.