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STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL
RELATING TO VETERANS CEMETERIES

BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS

BY

JOHN P. ALAMODIN
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF VETERANS SERVICES

JANUARY 31, 2025

Aloha Chair Elefante, Vice-Chair Wakai, and members of the committee:

I am John P. Alamodin, Director, Office of Veterans Services, State of Hawaii,
Department of Defense

The Office of Veterans Services (OVS) provides written testimony in **SUPPORT** of SB
609.

Pursuant to Chapter 363, Hawaii Revised Statutes, the Hawaii Office of Veterans' Services has main offices at the Tripler Army Medical Center and the Daniel K. Akaka Department of Veterans Affairs Community Based Outpatient Clinic. We are responsible for development and management of policies and programs related to Veterans', their dependents, and/or survivors. OVS acts as a liaison between the Governor and veterans' organizations and between the Department of Veterans Affairs and individual veterans. OVS has counselors and support staff on Kauai, Oahu, Maui and in East and West Hawaii. OVS also manages the Hawaii State Veterans Cemetery in Kaneohe.

Hawaii Data obtained through the Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, Honolulu Regional Office and in 2024, there were approximately 11,614 veterans receiving disability compensation from the VA.

The number of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) rated 100% disabled service-connected veterans in the State of Hawaii who have their respective addresses listed in Hawaii through December 31, 2024, is 9,723.

Within OVS, Veterans Services Counselors are the primary liasons and advocates to support and assist Veterans access benefits and resources afforded to them. These positions are located in the Department of Defense, Office of Veterans Services, with 7 positions on Oahu and two serving on Kauai, Maui, and Hawaii island respectively. OVS is the principal agency in State government responsible for the administration, conduct, and coordination of all functions and activities on behalf of veterans and their dependents. The position performs a variety of counseling and services administration functions to veterans, National Guard (NG) members, Reservists and active duty service members, their dependents and/or survivors. Each Veterans Services Counselor is responsible to initiate and follow through on a wide range of casework activities that may include complex and difficult problems encountered by Veterans seeking assistance. Staff members will develop and participate in a variety of community activities involving active duty personnel, veterans and their family members. Currently, individual Veterans Services Counselors manage caseloads between 300-700 Veterans.

The proposed appropriation could enhance the scope of services provided in many ways, and two courses of action that would address immediate, presenting needs. First, provide an in-house capacity to provide legal assistance for complex cases and claims. Presently, Veterans Services Counselors can access legal guidance on a consultation basis to assist with complex cases. Often, these cases require multiple appeals and hearings that can be time-intensive and a challenge to case manage along with other Veterans to assist. Legal counsel in OVS would allow a staff person to be specifically assigned to complex cases and dedicate the requisite time necessary to service, case manage, conduct legal support and research, file appeals, attend hearings, and perform other specialized duties as required.

Second, the proposed appropriation could establish a Transition Assistance Program to assist service members with their transition from military service to civilian life. When active duty service members decided to transition out of the military, there are enrolled in Transition Assistance Programs to assist with employment, medical, behavioral health, relocation, and other identified needs. For National Guard members and Reservists, varying levels of transition support is available, but in absence of an established Transition Assistance Program, many find themselves not fully ready and prepared to make the transition. A Transition Assistance Program in OVS would work with the National Guard and Reserve to identify transitioning service members at least one year prior to exiting the military and engage these service members in resources and support to assist with employment, medical, behavioral health, relocation, VA enrollment and claims process, and other identified needs.

The use of the proposed appropriation would not be limited to the aforementioned initiatives, but does illustrate what could be achieved in a short period of time while also identifying other opportunities to enhance service delivery to our Veterans statewide.

The Department of Defense supports this bill provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities indicated in the Executive Budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

John P. Alamodin, john.p.alamodin@hawaii.gov



Senator Brandon J.C. Elefante, Chair
Senator Glenn Wakai, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs

Testimony of **VFW Department of Hawai'i**

Friday, January 31, 2025

Strong Support for Senate Bill No. 609 – Relating to the Office of Veterans' Services

Aloha Chair Elefante, Vice Chair Wakai and Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in **strong support** for Senate Bill No. 609. This bill proposes to appropriate funds to the state Office of Veterans' Services (OVS) to perform its statutory duties, specific to providing information, counsel, aid, and assistance to veterans, and cooperating with federal agencies responsible for the administration of rights and benefits granted to veterans, their families, and their dependents.

This proposal is being suggested so OVS can use the additional funds to solicit professional services contracts (PSCs) authorized by the Hawai'i Procurement Code to assist veterans with pursuing and obtaining their hard-earned veterans benefits. It is preferred that OVS solicit PSCs from Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) accredited veterans service organizations (VSOs) service officers that have and continue to provide this service to veterans in Hawai'i, free of charge.

For example, last year, Texas appropriated over \$44 million to support their state's veterans. The amount proposed in this bill is small in comparison to what Texas provided to its citizens, but it is a step in the right direction. Therefore, I implore your committee to pass Senate Bill No. 609, unamended.

Respectfully,

Jame K. Schaedel
Member, National Legislative Committee
VFW Department of Hawai'i

SB-609

Submitted on: 1/29/2025 8:05:32 AM

Testimony for PSM on 1/31/2025 3:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
William K. Chang	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I fully support SB609.

SB-609

Submitted on: 1/29/2025 7:41:49 PM

Testimony for PSM on 1/31/2025 3:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mike Golojuch, Sr.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support SB609.

Mike Golojuch, Sr., Lt Col, USAF(Ret), Former Chair, Advisory Board to the Office of Veterans' Services.