

Oregon has over 322,000 veterans, and many of these qualify for Federal veteran's benefits. However, only three out of ten Oregon veterans have accessed and claimed their federal benefits.

This bill is about getting more veterans connected with services that could help, whether it's education, housing, food, health care, or something else.

Taking steps to increase veterans' access and use of federal benefits is good for our veterans, and for the state as well. In 2013, \$2.2 billion in federal benefit dollars came into Oregon. \$92 million was received every month by more than 61,000 veterans. (In Lane County alone, almost \$10 million comes into the county each month in these cash payments to veterans.)

The legislature passed a Bill in 2013 requiring the Driver and Motor Vehicle Services Division (DMV) to provide the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs' (ODVA) with the names and addresses of service members and veterans who applied for license or title transfers. Through this process, ODVA receives about 3,000 names a month.

This program follows the "No Wrong Door Policy" for veterans: it doesn't matter how a veteran makes contact with state government (in other words, it doesn't matter which "door" a veteran uses) the veteran will be able to connect with ODVA. ODVA has been contacting more than 27,000 veterans from the information that DMV provides. ODVA sends the *Veterans Benefits* magazine which details all federal and state benefits, and how a veteran can contact a county veteran service officer who can file a federal claim on their behalf.

Based on the success of the DMV process, this bill takes the same approach, expanding it to the Oregon Health Authority. It requires OHA to take that simple step: ask people who apply for health care services or benefits whether they've served in the military and if they'd like to be contacted by ODVA.

During committee discussion, the Representative from District 59 suggested that veterans using housing services should also be offered this open door. The Housing and Community Services

Department in collaboration with the Community Action Partnership of Oregon has written a letter to the committee expressing their intent to craft effective, efficient strategies to ensure connections with other agencies and ODVA become part of their daily work. I want to express thanks to the Representative and the Department for helping us to expand this capability to reach even more veterans.

Closing

With this bill in place, more veterans will be able to access and use federal benefits. Many are using local resources instead of federal resources available – health care, senior and disabled services, even employment and housing assistance. Ultimately, this bill brings federal resources to bear when possible, substituting for state dollars, thereby helping to make the most use of limited state dollars in safety net services.

As we increase the federal dollars coming to Oregon veterans, more money goes directly to the veteran, and it then recirculates in the Oregon economy. Right now, federal dollars are left unclaimed. If better outreach efforts increased the compensation and benefit dollars by only 2%, the federal dollars going directly to veterans would increase by \$22 million in just one year. That's a lot of money to help Oregon veterans, and to help stretch state services.

For the veterans who have faithfully served our country, this bill will help direct them to the resources and benefits that they have earned. I ask for your support. Thank you.