

House Committee on Appropriations
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th Street
Topeka, Kansas 66612

January 25, 2021

Chairman Waymaster and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to express my support for HB2020/1.

After the 2019 session I organized a strategic planning event for the veteran community. Twenty-seven (27) veteran service organizations (VSOs) from around the state met here in the Capitol. We brought in facilitators and set up sessions to help the VSOs establish a unified priority list. The Governor's office, several state agencies and other legislators attended the session as well. After a full day of activities, the facilitators presented the top 5 items and the group approved. By far, the #1 item was a Soldier's Home in Northeast Kansas.

The other priority items included:

- Property Tax relief
- Toll road exemption for disabled veterans
- Occupational Licensing
- In-state tuition for Children and Spouses of military members / veterans regardless of state of residence

The VSOs agreed to hold an annual event to update the list. In 2020 the meeting was cancelled due to COVID but they are arranging a 2021 event for the summer.

We do have many existing Soldier Home beds located in Fort Dodge that are unused. There are several factors for this that the Director of the Commission on Veterans Affairs will most likely address. I have personally spoken with Governor Kelly about the need for a Soldier's Home in NE Kansas. She stated she supported a Soldier's Home in NE Kansas but is concerned about the unused beds before we build more.

There is a bed limitation based on veteran population in a state, but that limitation is active when the homes are within two (2) hours of each other. In this case, the new homes are not within that range. I requested that information officially from the VA. As soon as it is received, I will forward to this committee.

Additionally, in several discussions, the VSO community expressed the desire for a Soldier's Home in NE Kansas to Senator Moran and he repeatedly expressed his support to them and to me in separate conversations.

I want to thank the committee for their time and for their support of this important legislation.

Respectfully,



Chris Croft
District 8