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**TESTIMONY 2015**

**HB 583**

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**Monetary Donations to Charitable Veterans' Organizations  
in Lieu of Court-Ordered Community Service Help Texas Veterans  
*Contributions to Veterans' Organizations Provide Stability for Veterans***

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is LaShondra Jones and I am a Policy Associate with the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition. I am speaking not only as a Policy Associate but also as a Marine veteran. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to present testimony in favor of HB 583, which allows defendants to give donations to charitable veterans' organizations in lieu of performing community service.

**MONETARY DONATIONS TO CHARITABLE VETERANS' ORGANIZATIONS HAVE A POSITIVE ECONOMIC IMPACT ON TEXAS VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES, HELPING VETERANS AFTER DISCHARGE**

Texas has the second-largest veteran population in the United States with approximately 1.7 million<sup>1</sup> non-active-duty military veterans, in addition to active-duty personnel stationed at military bases across the state. Veterans in the United States can face economic and other hardships after military discharge and during their return to civilian life.

Despite being lauded as "heroes," many veterans face poverty and unemployment<sup>2</sup> and may lack the finances, resources, and tools to complete a successful transition at home. In Texas, 19,000 veterans, or 8.7 percent, were out of work in 2014, up from 8.3 percent in 2012 and much higher than the 2013 average unemployment rate of 6.3 percent for all Texans.<sup>3</sup> One in nine veterans is living at or below the poverty line, and 13 percent of homeless people in the US have been in the military.<sup>4</sup>

Overcoming these issues may require public resources and assistance. Court-ordered monetary donations to charitable veterans' organizations can provide financial assistance for medical bills, home and car modifications, housing and employment assistance, food, and other help, enabling a positive return to the community.

**MONETARY DONATIONS TO CHARITABLE VETERANS' ORGANIZATIONS HELP DISABLED VETERANS AND THEIR CAREGIVERS ACCESS SPECIALIZED REHABILITATION AND COUNSELING ASSISTANCE**

Many veterans return home with physical disabilities and mental health disorders such as traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, and military sexual trauma. Court-ordered monetary donations to charitable veterans' organizations will provide veterans with greater access to rehabilitative treatment and counseling services outside of U.S. Department of Veterans Administration hospitals. Such services help veterans heal and improve their lives, promoting family stability.

**MONETARY DONATIONS TO CHARITABLE VETERANS' ORGANIZATIONS ASSIST CHILDREN OF VETERANS**

The military lifestyle can present challenges for veterans' children and families, including frequent relocation, school transitions, separation from extended family, increased responsibility coupled with a sense of loss when a

*Continued on reverse.*

parent deploys, and the physical and psychological stress faced when a parent returns.<sup>5</sup> Schools and community agencies have begun to focus on the effect of this stress on the children of veterans, finding them at risk for physical, psychological, and family-functioning difficulties, and negatively affected by deployment-related issues.<sup>6</sup> Court-ordered monetary donations to charitable veterans' organizations can support educational institutions and after-school mentoring programs that serve children of military families.

## KEY FINDINGS

- From 2001 through 2014, Texas spent \$786.4 million on veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.<sup>7</sup>
- Approximately 27 percent, or 430,988, of Texas veterans, reported a disability in 2010.<sup>8</sup>
- Budget cuts at federal, state, and local levels have led to public-sector job losses, and because of the high concentration of veterans in public-sector employment, veterans are likely to be disproportionately affected by current and future budget cuts.<sup>9</sup>

## COST-SAVING AND PUBLIC SAFETY-DRIVEN SOLUTION: SUPPORT HB 583 BY REPRESENTATIVE LARSON

- **HB 583 provides financial aid for charitable veterans' organizations through court-ordered monetary donations, allowing such organizations to better provide veterans with needed resources and assistance as they transition to civilian life.** Court-ordered monetary donations to charitable veterans' organizations will enable greater assistance to veterans and their families during economic hardship, helping them avoid homelessness and providing improved linkage to treatment, counseling, and other resources.
- **HB 583 saves Texas money.** Court-ordered monetary donations to charitable veterans' organizations will allow more veterans to access non-government resources and services, thereby reducing state expenditures on veterans.

## Citations

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<sup>1</sup> United States Department of Veterans Affairs, *Veteran Population*, November 7, 2014, [http://www.va.gov/vetdata/veteran\\_population.asp](http://www.va.gov/vetdata/veteran_population.asp).

<sup>2</sup> John Rowe, "US veterans face economic and physical hardship," *World Socialist Website*, December 28, 2013, <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2013/12/28/vets-d28.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Sheryl Jean, "Veterans unemployment rises in Texas, falls nationally," *The Dallas Morning News*, March 20, 2014, <http://www.dallasnews.com/business/headlines/20140320-veterans-unemployment-rises-in-texas-falls-nationally.ece>.

<sup>4</sup> John Rowe, "US veterans face economic and physical hardship," *World Socialist Website*, December 28, 2013, <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2013/12/28/vets-d28.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Big Brothers Big Sisters of San Diego County, *Operation BIGS - Military Mentoring*, [http://www.sdbigs.org/site/c.8hKPI5MGih10E/b.6466745/k.47EB/Operation\\_Bigs\\_Military\\_Mentoring.htm](http://www.sdbigs.org/site/c.8hKPI5MGih10E/b.6466745/k.47EB/Operation_Bigs_Military_Mentoring.htm).

<sup>6</sup> Joy R. Pemberton, Teresa L. Kramer, Joaquin Borrego, Jr., Richard R. Owen, "Kids at the VA? A call for evidence-based parenting interventions for returning veterans," *Psychological Services*, 10(2), May (2013), 194–202, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23088402>.

<sup>7</sup> Brian Smith, "Cost of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans' Care to Texas," Boston University, January 3, 2015, <http://www.costsofwar.org/sites/default/files/articles/52/attachments/Smith%20FIN%20.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Texas Workforce Investment Council, *Veterans in Texas: A Demographic Study*, December 2012, [http://gov.texas.gov/files/twic/Veterans\\_in\\_Texas.pdf](http://gov.texas.gov/files/twic/Veterans_in_Texas.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Joint Economic Committee, United States Congress, *Building Job Opportunities for Returning Veterans*, May 2013, [http://www.jec.senate.gov/public/?a=Files.Serve&File\\_id=368731bc-cc81-48ea-915d-abd605064b51](http://www.jec.senate.gov/public/?a=Files.Serve&File_id=368731bc-cc81-48ea-915d-abd605064b51).