



PRESS RELEASE

Mike DeWine, Governor Deborah Ashenhurst, Director

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Contact: Chief of Communications: (614) 728-0235

New State Budget is Beneficial to Ohio Veterans *Dir. Ashenhurst notes Ohio's "enduring commitment" to service members*

COLUMBUS – With the approving signature of Ohio Governor Mike DeWine, House Bill 166 became law today and signaled the onset of the state's general operating budget for FY2020-21.

"I am proud that this budget will significantly impact the lives of Ohioans through its unprecedented investments," said Governor DeWine. "It lays the groundwork for a better Ohio for generations to come. This budget will lead to healthier children, stronger families, safer communities, an enhanced workforce, and a more prosperous Ohio, while also providing significant tax relief for every Ohio taxpayer and regulatory relief for Ohio businesses."

The budget – which was approved with bipartisan support by both the Ohio House of Representatives and the Ohio Senate – also positively impacts Ohio's veterans, especially those who reside in the Ohio Veterans Homes in Sandusky and Georgetown. Both Homes are operated by the Ohio Department of Veterans Services (ODVS).

In the newly approved budget, funding for the Veterans Homes will increase from about \$29.3 million to more than \$41.4 million in FY 2020 and up to \$45.4 million in FY 2021, which represents a two-year increase of more than \$28 million.

Over the past decade, the Ohio Veterans Homes have taken on rising operating costs and a litany of new federal regulations. The increased funding for the Veterans Homes received consistent support during the five-month budget process from legislators and staff alike.

"The Trusted Voice for Veterans"

77 South High Street
7th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215

614 | 644 0898
614 | 728 9498 F
www.ohiovets.gov

“With every dollar spent, two federal dollars from VA or other sources are pulled into Ohio, making it a solid investment for the taxpayers,” said ODVS Director Deborah Ashenhurst. “Every penny invested into the Veterans Homes goes toward care for our men and women of service, and fulfilling a state’s promise to those infirmed, injured and aging heroes of Ohio.”

The budget also includes increases of \$37,214 for the Ohio Veterans Bonus administrative fund and \$10,000 for the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame in the new biennium as well as an additional \$217,438 spread across the state’s 13 recognized veteran service organizations for service work.

Also of note, a \$100,000 increase was added in during Senate deliberations, which will go directly to Save a Warrior foundation – an organization that addresses issues related to Post Traumatic Stress.

“Ohio veterans served selflessly at home, abroad, and in our communities. Ohio’s new budget demonstrates our enduring commitment to veterans, and provides the Department of Veterans Services the resources to continue to serve the nearly 800,000 former service members who live in Ohio, especially the residents of the Ohio Veterans Homes,” Director Ashenhurst said. “The vast majority of the resources approved for our department go to the care of our wartime veterans. Ohio has supported the veterans of every American conflict since the Civil War. Care has changed, but our commitment has never wavered.

“The Ohio Department of Veterans Services is motivated by the leadership and vision of Gov. Mike DeWine and Lt. Gov. Husted. We are grateful for the commitment of Speaker Householder and President Obhof, and the vital support of the entire General Assembly. We are resolved to use Ohioans’ tax dollars wisely as we continue to serve those who have served.”

The state also greenlighted a \$3-million transcranial magnetic stimulation pilot program that Mental Health and Addiction Services (MHAS) will operate in conjunction with ODVS. Additionally, MHAS is authorized to spend up to \$500,000 in each fiscal year to support suicide prevention efforts through a study that focuses on suicide rates in Ohio.

The budget requires the Chancellor of the Ohio Department of Higher Education to collaborate with ODVS to develop veterans preference guidelines for institutions of higher learning.

The Ohio Senate also noted earlier today that the new operating budget, “increases funding for various veterans’ organizations, including innovative programs focused on groundbreaking research for brain trauma and other mental health concerns.”

Other Language Involving Veterans

The budget also ...

- ... renames the Ohio War Orphans Scholarship to the Ohio War Orphans and Severely Disabled Veterans’ Children Scholarship. That program allows for \$975,850 to be allocated in FY 2020 to the Ashland University Military and Veterans Resource Center Project.
- ... requires that \$250,000 of the transferred cash from the GRF to the Legal Aide Fund in each fiscal year to be distributed by the Ohio Access to Justice Foundation to Ohio's civil legal aid societies for the sole purpose of providing legal services for veterans.
- ... requires the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles to allow a person who qualifies as a disabled veteran to apply for and receive a license plate that recognizes military service or valor for up to two motor vehicles without the payment of any registration taxes or fees.

About the Ohio Veterans Homes

In 1888, the citizens of Ohio established a home for Ohio's honorably discharged Civil War veterans who, due to disease, wounds or other causes, were unable to earn a living. On Nov. 19 of that year, the first 17 men were admitted to the Ohio Soldiers and Sailors Home, known today as the Ohio Veterans Home. In 2003, the state’s mission expanded with the opening of the Georgetown Home in Brown County. Together, the two Homes, provide care for more than 800 veterans, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. OVH residents currently range in age from 46 to 101.