

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
ECONOMICS AFFAIRS INTERIM COMMITTEE**

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Roger A. Hagan

Legislative Committee Chairman
Montana Department of the American Legion

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, for the record my name is Roger A. Hagan. I serve the Montana Department of the American Legion as the Vice-Chair of the National Legislative Council and the state Legislative Committee Chair. We appreciate your committee extending an invitation to our veteran's service organization to participate on this panel related to Senate Joint Resolution 32, a study of emergency care and related veteran care needs in our state.

Let me begin by thanking this committee and, by extension, all our state legislators for their support of Montana veteran and military needs. As you may be aware, our veteran population in Montana ranks 2nd and sometimes 1st per capita. We have approximately 100,000 veterans and 160,000 veteran dependents living in Montana. Our state legislators have done an amazing job keeping our needs on their radar screens, especially since September 11th, 2001. Thank you for that.

The primary focus of SJR32 centers around the proposals advanced in Senate Bill 104 and House Bill 612. The American Legion is not able to provide input on the proposed legislation of Senate Bill 104 as we are not experts in the field of emergency services. Emergency services are provided to our citizens by trained and dedicated emergency responders (either public, private or voluntary) and the emergency care requirements are generally the same, regardless of the patient's civilian or veteran status. Therefore, we will defer to the specialists and oversight groups involved in emergency care to address the merits of bills such as Senate Bill 104.

House Bill 612 is much more specific to veteran needs and care. The bill proposes to expand emergency care provider training with an optional endorsement for certification as a Community Veteran Emergency Care Provider (CVECP). While our members appreciate the focus brought to light of particular veteran issues and needs, we feel the scope of education, training and subsequent services provided for with this proposed endorsement goes beyond emergent care and reaches into areas of veteran support not related to medical services.

Training requirements for the CVECP endorsement include:

- mental health referral
- pain and stress management techniques (including medication management, exercise, and nutrition)
- electronic medical records documentation
- veteran family considerations
- benefit programs for veterans, including social security benefits and referral of veterans and families to entities for facilitate benefit claims
- peer or faith-based counseling

While each of the above needs may be valid for one or more veterans and/or their family(ies), we believe this type of service is well beyond the scope of emergency care. Mental health referral currently can be accomplished by the veteran, servicemember or their family by calling the Veteran and Military Crisis Line, an 800# which is staffed 24/7/365. Pain and stress management techniques are more suited to a referral to qualified medical services, again those services are available through the Crisis Line. The training required for electronic medical records documentation raises a concern of privacy and possible Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 ("HIPAA") violations. Social Security benefit programs are better left to the professionals of the Social Security Administration. Additionally, the State of Montana has provided highly trained Veteran Service Officers (VSO's) who serve the Montana Veteran's Affairs Division (MVAD) to assist veterans and their families in navigating the complex veteran benefit claims process.

It is the American Legion's commitment to help our veterans in every legitimate and legal way we can by providing resource information through our local veteran advocates across Montana. While we do not want to appear ungrateful for efforts to improve veteran services throughout our state, we do not want to convolute the process by mixing emergency care with referrals for daily challenges of those who served so faithfully.

Mr. Chairman, the Montana Department of the American Legion wishes to again thank you for your support of our veterans and for including our veteran service organization on this panel today. As we approach Veteran's Day this Saturday, November 11th, let's all pause to thank a veteran or current servicemember for their devotion to our country. This concludes my testimony and I am available for questions.