



**AMERICAN
LEGION**

Greetings, Chair and members. My name is Dr. Kristy Janigo, and I am a third generation Army veteran. I am The American Legion Department of Minnesota Legislative Chair. And I'm an assistant county veteran service officer for my day job, where I help some of the state's most vulnerable veterans find housing, navigate their involvement with the justice system, and access life changing veteran benefits.

First, I want to thank Senator Klein and his co-authors for working on this bill. Last year, we supported HF 2000 and its senate companion because of the charitable gambling tax cuts and the change to lawful purpose expenditures under code 22 to allow our posts to complete crucial capital improvements. We were devastated that the bill fell short in the final hours of the 2024 session, yet we are grateful the negotiations continued which is what brought us SF 757 in its current form. Regarding issues that pertain to veterans service organizations, this bill is way better than where we started at the beginning of last year because it doesn't force an arbitrary sunset on us or constrain how much of our revenues we can use on our building repairs, when many of our buildings are unsafe or at the very least out of compliance with the ADA. Rest assured, our posts will still strive for the maximum possible star rating with the Gambling Control Board even for those posts that set aside revenues to fix up buildings. Our donations are how we carry out our charitable mission across our four pillars: Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, National Security, Children & Youth, and Americanism.

Our more than 50,000 American Legion Department of Minnesota members agreed to prioritize advocating for these tax cuts above all other things we want for the service member, military family, and veteran community – again this year, because we think this will have the biggest impact. There are 537 American Legion posts throughout Minnesota, and 193 of them have charitable gambling operations. Those operations account for roughly 10% of all charitable gambling in Minnesota. While some say “Oh, it's just gambling,” we respectfully disagree. Charitable gambling is inextricably linked with crucial emergency supports for veterans.

I ask for all lawmakers' support on this, both parties, for the veterans. We do worry often that the general public does not understand our issues, so whenever we have someone coming alongside us with their support, it really matters. In my day job, I work with veterans who have had everything go wrong in their lives. They sustained physical and mental disabilities during service that led to self-medicating with alcohol or drugs. Which led to them not being able to work or family issues, and justice involvement. Which led to housing instability and food insecurity. My partners and I fight to keep some of these veterans alive, under roofs, and out of jail. We experience a tremendous amount of secondary trauma from the stories we hear of these veterans. I tell my new employees that this work will cost them, and they should have a therapist and a robust support system. This is unavoidable. We have to hear and then retell our veterans' stories in the pursuit of federal, state, and nonprofit benefits. As many benefits as there are specifically for the veterans community, they are often not enough, or else it takes so long for the benefits to come in that there could be months of a veteran living on the streets.

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That is when I turn to charitable gambling operations of our Legion and VFW posts, to ask them to pitch in, to save a home, get the power turned back on, prevent an eviction, to feed small children, to make that critical car repair for the veteran living out of their vehicle in the dead of winter in subzero temps in Minnesota. These funds are a big part of how we reached an effective end to veteran homelessness last fall in Hennepin County, just now in Ramsey County, with the state of Minnesota as a whole soon able to make such a declaration.

With heavy state and local taxes on top of the other bills we must pay, these expenses handcuff our posts from helping the veterans in their community who are suffering. And I can tell you that I've recently lost veterans I've tried to save, and their losses will always haunt me. Is this really how we will treat those who risked and sacrificed everything including their lives? Is it not the government's responsibility to get out of the way when a charitable organization can meet needs in the community that they cannot fulfill? I am sorry if I sound angry, but I'm the one who has to look these veterans in the eyes. This is reality for some of our veterans.

Although most of us stopped wearing the uniform years ago, veterans have a deep-seated need to continue serving their communities and the changes to e-pulltabs that were enacted at the beginning of this year have our people worried that mission will be compromised, and we've already seen a nearly 20% drop in revenues. I can assure you that the cap to gaming fees and the very small tax cut that was passed were far from sufficient. Lawmakers should not pat themselves on the back for "helping us" while veterans continue to struggle.

As you have heard in the past, the funds we donate pay for honor guards at burial ceremonies, outdoor recreation for disabled veterans, suicide prevention programs, and stopgap funding for homeless veterans. We donate to area schools' programs to help housing and food insecure children. We support nonprofit human services organizations near our posts. We fund youth sports scholarships and equipment for local fire departments. We also fund local parades, fireworks displays, county fairs, fire equipment, school flags, marching band uniforms, football headsets, international sister-city efforts, and wheelchair-friendly playground equipment. What I am describing to you represents the best of America, and these traditions need to continue. Thank you again for hearing this bill today.

-Dr. Kristy Janigo

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Kristy Janigo".

The American Legion Department of Minnesota Legislative Chair

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