



Greetings, Chairs and members. My name is Dr. Kristy Janigo, and I am The American Legion Department of Minnesota Legislative Chair. Last year in the House, Representative Wiens and his impressive slate of 13 bipartisan authors had the same bill, which received much support. We hope this is the year where Congressionally Chartered Veterans Service Organizations will finally see the elimination of property taxes for their buildings, and we're counting on you.

I have in attendance with me Josh Fowler, the operations manager at Arcade-Phalen American Legion Post 577 in St. Paul, a post which has struggled with its property tax burden. It has faced setbacks with the condition of its building covered in the Star Tribune and Pioneer Press and is at risk of losing its building. I also have with me Lori Allert, the commander of Anoka American Legion Post 102. Last year, the Anoka Post paid nearly \$15,000 for property taxes. Nearby posts Champlin and Ham Lake have turned in their charters, and the Anoka post has been experiencing increased requests for financial support from neighboring suburbs. Post 102's ability to serve these increasing needs is limited by its tax burden.

Many 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations receive property tax exemptions after qualifying through their county assessor. Veterans service organizations often have other designations such as 501(c)(4) and 501(c)(19). We are asking for access to the same nonprofit property tax exemptions provided to 501(c)(3) nonprofits. Congressionally chartered veterans organizations have a federal requirement of reporting their volunteer and charitable efforts directly to Congress annually, and because of that accountability, it makes sense for them to pay zero property taxes. There are a handful of states that provide this same benefit as a recognition of the good veteran service organizations do for their communities, and we'd like to see Minnesota among them. A zero-tax measure would clear up much of the confusion county assessors across our 87 Minnesota counties have regarding posts' taxes. This drives workload and inefficiencies that are inevitably covered by taxpayers.

People make assumptions about our buildings, that they are just bars or restaurants or places to gamble. That's not true. So much more happens in our buildings. We have our post meetings there where our membership decides which local organizations to donate proceeds from charitable gambling. In this manner, we prop up small, local nonprofits providing important community services including youth sports, addressing food insecurity and homelessness, and funding public safety equipment for our cities, such as fire trucks. These are important gaps filled that federal, state, and local government cannot address.

Most of you have heard my story, of how I grew up in rural North Dakota having an American Legion post in my hometown where my granddad was a member. Our posts in Minnesota are increasingly diverse, as veterans seek places of refuge where they can relax in the camaraderie of like minded people who have shared experiences. Veterans tend to be slow to trust other people, and that can lead to isolation. We need social connection as much as other people do, perhaps more because many do not understand what some of us have been through protecting this country and its freedoms.

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We hold veteran suicide prevention trainings with VA partners so that people recognize the signs of suicidal ideation and know how to get someone help. Our halls are places where people gather for birthday parties, celebrations of life, and weddings. In small towns, our posts are the only option for such gatherings.

Post homes can be important meeting places. For my day job, I am an assistant county veteran service officer, and I've met homeless veterans to counsel them on housing programs, walk the anxious spouse of a veteran through the application to our state veterans homes, or met veterans to discuss federal VA benefits claims at American Legion posts.

The American Legion Department of Minnesota has a total of 531 posts, but more than half of our posts already do not have buildings. Two hundred sixty of our posts have buildings. Of those, several are struggling and at risk of closing in the future. The communities of Stillwater, Marshall, Northfield, Waite Park, Coon Rapids, and a number of them in the metro area have all had to sell their buildings to survive in the recent past. How many more communities will need to lose the gathering center for charity fundraising and activities before relief is provided?

Thank you for hearing this bill today and I am happy to answer any questions.

-Dr. Kristy Janigo

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

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