



Greetings, Mr. Chair and members. My name is Dr. Kristy Janigo, and I am The American Legion Department of Minnesota Legislative Chair. Before I go any further, I want you to know that this bill HF 4038 is wholeheartedly supported by the eight organizations of the Minnesota Commander's Task Force, which represents tens of thousands of Minnesota veterans in our combined memberships: The American Legion, the VFW, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Amvets, Marine Corps League, and Jewish War Veterans. They have been working on

this issue for years.

Representative Wiens and this impressive slate of 13 bipartisan authors, thank you for introducing this bill. In my opinion, it is one of the most important issues on both the CTF and the Legion's platform this year because we have seen a disturbing trend of our organizations losing their buildings. You will make tens of thousands of veterans very happy if this bill is successful. Furthermore, hundreds of communities across Minnesota will directly benefit from continuing to have veteran service organizations with brick and mortar buildings.

Many 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations received 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 Minnesota needs to be among them. As a side benefit, a zero-tax measure would clear up much of the confusion city and county assessors statewide have regarding veteran posts and tax laws. This also would halt what we see as unfair treatment and prevent more posts from going under.

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. That said, my post in Osseo, Minnesota is not my granddad's post, although we always work to respect the legacy of all wars and honor the military service of all veterans. Our posts 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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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. 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. Every year, my post in Osseo holds a Santa event where area children can come to have a free breakfast, receive a free toy, and get their picture with Santa and Mrs. Claus. Hundreds of children came this year, and it was clear to me this event has become a public service.

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, calm an anxious spouse of a veteran and make an application to veterans homes, or met veterans to discuss VA benefits claims at American Legion posts.

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

-Dr. Kristy Janigo

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kristy A. Janigo". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "K".

The American Legion Department of Minnesota Legislative Chair

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