

Written Testimony
PA Elks State Association
Joint Public Hearing
House Education Committee
House Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness
September 26, 2016

The Elks is a distinctively American fraternal organization which prides itself on its civic and patriotic obligations. Enter any Elks Lodge and you will find the pride and devotion of being an American citizen. From our Heritage Corner to the respectful displays of our American flag, the Elks inspires the civic mindedness of the love for our County.

Our Heritage Corner displays those precious documents that we as Americans hold dear: The Bill of Rights, The U.S. Constitution, The Declaration of Independence, The Gettysburg Address and The Monroe Doctrine.

Each June 14th across America, Elks Lodges perform its annual Flag Day Ritual. The Ritual consists of a history of heraldry and the history of the flags that have flown over our land. Coupled with remarks from keynote speakers from our community, a brief history of our nation is rendered. This ritual service is a public event and has been delivered in a wide variety of venues including the Rotunda of our State Capitol.

One of the programs that are near and dear to the Elks is our Americanism program which is aimed at elementary and middle school students. Each year Lodges across the nation contact local schools and provide them with an essay question that is particular to Americanism. In 2015 the question was “What does Veteran’s Day mean to me?”. As part of our testimony, a copy of the national winners essay has been included.

The Americanism Essay Contests begins at the local level, your community Elks Lodge. Winners are judged and sent on to a second level, judged and those winners sent to the state level. Winners at the state level are then passed onto the national level.

The Elks believe in the importance of educating our youth to understand the civic responsibilities of the obligations of being an American citizen. The foundation of our nation is paramount on these obligations and we as citizens must make every effort to ensure that our youth embrace them.

Over the past few decades there seems to be less of an effort on educating our youth on these responsibilities. House Bill 1858 takes direct aim at helping to restore this vital part of civic education. We believe that it is excellent opportunity to help foster the importance of what it means to be an American citizen.

Jane Procopchak
Americanism Chair
PA Elks State Association

Thomas W. Helsel, Jr.
Government Relations Chair
PA Elks State Association

What Veteran's Day Means to Me

James Swartz

What would you call a person who offers safekeeping, support, and unconditional love? You might call the person a parent; or a veteran! We need to honor and support our veterans now because, like parents, they have supported us in every time of need.

In a way, veterans are like the “parents” of our country. For example, most parents would risk their lives for their children, and likewise our veterans were willing to sacrifice their lives for us. Our veterans, just like parents, were always thinking about our future and they always wanted the best for us. Our “parents” didn’t want to fight; they still took care of us. A third similarity between parents and veterans is their sense of pride. Our veterans were so proud of our country and loved it so much that they treated it like it was their child. They wanted to represent it and be a role model for American citizens.

What parent doesn’t want his or her child to be the best? Well, veterans want their country to be the best, too. We should be showing pride and love to our “parents” since they have shown it towards our country.

Finally, the veterans from the wars like World War I and World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War aren’t getting any younger. Our parents aren’t either. We all want to take care of our parents when they need it, so why shouldn’t we do the same for our veterans? Many veterans faced disrespect when they came back from war. Our veterans need to be honored today, especially since many weren’t when they needed it most: when they came home. Without our veterans, we would not have our freedom.

Since we honor our parents on Mother’s Day and Father’s Day, why not our veterans, on at least Veterans’ Day? It’s worth it to just take an extra couple of minutes this Veteran’s Day to make our veterans feel the appreciation they deserve. However, we truly need to think of every day as Veteran’s Day. They deserve it.