

# Favorable Testimony on House Bill No. 7094

Submitted to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Hearing Date: February 10, 2026

Chairman Azzinaro, Vice Chair Shallcross Smith, and honorable members of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs:

My name is **John Gallo**, and I am submitting this testimony in **strong support** of **House Bill 7094**, which would establish the **Rhode Island Orange Heart Medal** to formally recognize veterans whose service exposed them to toxic herbicides, burn pits, and other hazardous agents.

## Why This Legislation Matters

For generations, American service members have carried the invisible wounds of toxic exposure. From Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange, to Gulf War veterans facing oil fires and chemical hazards, to the post-9/11 generation who lived and worked beside burn pits—these men and women returned home with long-term health consequences that were often misunderstood, minimized, or ignored.

Rhode Island has always taken pride in honoring its veterans. Yet many of those affected by toxic exposure have never received formal recognition for the unique and lasting sacrifices they made. The Orange Heart Medal fills that gap. It acknowledges not only their service, but the **lifelong burden** that exposure has placed on them and their families.

## A Symbol of Recognition and Respect

This medal is not a benefit, nor does it replace federal programs. Instead, it serves as a **state-level acknowledgment** that Rhode Island sees these veterans, hears them, and values the sacrifices they made in environments that were hazardous through no fault of their own.

For many veterans, recognition is not about ceremony—it is about validation. It is about finally hearing their state say: *We know what happened to you, and we honor your courage.*

## A Bipartisan, Common-Sense Measure

House Bill 7094 is a thoughtful, compassionate, and fiscally responsible way to honor those who served in dangerous conditions. It aligns Rhode Island with a growing national movement to recognize toxic-exposed veterans and complements the intent of federal legislation such as the PACT Act.

## Conclusion

On behalf of the veterans I work with every day—and the many Rhode Islanders who continue to struggle with the health effects of toxic exposure—I respectfully urge the Committee to give **House Bill 7094** a **favorable recommendation**.

Thank you for your time and for your continued commitment to the veterans of our state.

Respectfully submitted,

John P Gallo Sr., Chairman  
Legislation Committee  
United Veterans Council of Rhode Island