

SPECIAL EDITION  
SEVENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY • 1945 - 2020

# 75



CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS  
ANNUAL REPORT 2020



California Transition Assistance Program informs and connects veterans of all eras to their earned federal and state benefits and to their community-based system of care, even as their needs change over time.

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## CACVSO PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE FOR 2021

The California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO) endured a challenging year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Unexpectedly in March, the pandemic adversely affected most County Veterans Service Offices, as it did other agencies and businesses. Fortunately, nearly all County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) were able to immediately adapt and continue providing valuable VA claims assistance to veterans and their families.

During FY 19/20, CVSOs statewide served 172,000 veterans. This resulted in the filing of 272,702 claims for VA benefits on behalf of those veterans and their families. These offices continue to be one of the few county agencies that bring in revenue for their general funds, and during this year \$542,536,749 in federal dollars were brought to California's economy. This is a significant return on investment from a statewide program that costs approximately \$34 million to operate.

CVSOs have experienced a new era of leadership, with more than half of all CVSOs being in their positions for three years or less. This brings a responsibility for formal continuing education training and mentorship, but also opportunity for innovation and progress. Many CVSOs are implementing new means to deliver services to veterans, such as Nevada County's Virtual Veterans Service Office and the Kern County Patriot Partnership. CACVSO, in cooperation with CalVet, hosted its first virtual training conference in October. Over 175 accredited Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs) were able to receive critical continuing education to maintain their state and national accreditations.

None of this would have been possible were it not for our continued collaborative efforts with the Governor, State Legislature and CalVet. Specifically, our relationships with Secretary Vito Imbasciani MD, Undersecretary Russell Atterberry, Deputy Secretaries Lindsey Sin, Keith Boylan, Xochitl Murillo, and John Spangler continue to strengthen and benefit California's veterans. Our continued receipt of state funding for Local Assistance is critical to delivering valuable benefits to veterans and their families. However, the needs continue to grow and we must step forward to meet them.

As an association, we must continue to educate our policymakers on the importance of CVSOs and the need for additional revenue from the State of California. In 2021, we will be seeking an increase of \$5.4 million in Local Assistance funding, which would bring the annual state budget appropriation for CVSOs to \$11 million. SB 419 authorized the \$11 million level in 2009; however, it was not until 2015 that the ongoing appropriation reached \$5.6 million, where it currently remains.

It has been an honor to serve as your President this year. I look forward to the important work and exciting innovation that will occur in 2021.

**Nathan Johnson**, President (February 2020 – February 2021)  
California Association of County Veterans Service Officers





STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
1227 O STREET, SUITE 300 | SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA 95814

**THE SECRETARY**

Since November 2015, I have had the honor of leading the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet), the state agency responsible for ensuring the nearly 1.6 million veterans in California have access to the benefits they have earned through their service.

As a dedicated partner to California's County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs), I extend my sincere congratulations for 75 years of service to our California veterans. CVSOs have always played a critical role in serving our large and diverse veteran population, a role that has become even more vital over this last year. Throughout this pandemic, CalVet and the CVSOs have worked hand-in-hand to help veterans and their families navigate benefits in new ways and to maintain access to vital services.

As social distancing and telecommuting became the new normal, CVSOs and CalVet responded in unison. Along with CalVet's three District Offices, the CVSOs implemented a statewide rollout of secure remote digital signature capability for claims documents, allowing veterans to file claims from the safety of their homes. They also worked closely with the USDVA to maintain appeals representation to the Board of Veteran Appeals through the use of virtual hearings.

The pandemic also compelled our two organizations to adjust how we conduct outreach. CalVet and the CVSOs worked with other state departments, universities, and community-based organizations to deliver critical benefits and mental health outreach over a new digital landscape, reaching nearly 5,300 service members, veterans, and their families. In addition, CVSOs are instrumental in the development of mental health programs funded through CalVet's \$2.4 million Proposition 63 Grant Program, providing vulnerable veterans, and those who serve them, critical behavioral health support and resources.

This strong partnership between CalVet and our CVSOs, especially during unexpected emergencies like this pandemic, is a shining example of what we can accomplish when different levels of government work together. In 2020, CVSOs brought in more than \$540 million in new, annualized federal benefits, and \$336 million in continuing annualized benefits for California veterans.

CVSOs and CalVet share an important mission – to serve California veterans and their families.

The entire CalVet team and I greatly appreciate the work they do and know this partnership will continue to benefit our California veterans for another 75 years and longer.

Vito Imbasciani MD  
Secretary

## SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

**The California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO)** is an organization of professional veterans' advocates. In California, as well as other states, County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) play a critical role in the veterans' advocacy system and are often the initial contact in the community for veterans' services. Through CVSOs, the CACVSO is committed to California counties to provide a vital and efficient system of services and advocacy to veterans, their dependents and survivors.

Today, 56 of California's 58 counties have CVSOs to advocate not only for veterans and their families, but also for active duty, National Guard and military reserve members.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 5** 75 Years of Service
- 8** Veterans By the Numbers
- 10** Making The Most of Veterans Benefits
- 12** Who Funds CVSOs?
- 15** Impact of Veterans Claims by County
- 20** CVSOs Adapt and Overcome During COVID
- 22** Real Stories, Real Lives Changed
- 27** Around the Capitol
- 28** Legislator of the Year
- 31** 2021 Legislative Platform
- 35** 2020 Victories for Veterans
- 37** Small Bill, Big Impact



### ON THE COVER

American servicemen and women gather in front of "Rainbow Corner" Red Cross club in Paris to celebrate the unconditional surrender of the Japanese - August 15, 1945.





# THEY'RE HOME!

*Now What?*

The British liner RMS Queen Mary enters New York harbor filled with thousands of US soldiers returning from Europe after VE Day in 1945.





**The California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO) is celebrating 75 years of service to California's veterans.** When we look at the struggles still facing many of today's veterans, it's easy to forget how far veterans' services have come.

Created in the wake of WWII, the CACVSO was born out of both necessity and patriotism. In 1945, the US welcomed home four million veterans. And while they were happy to be home, the transition was no easier for them than it is for today's soldiers.

According to government documents, oral history and personal accounts, "10,000 veterans a month were being diagnosed with psycho-neurotic disorder (now known as PTSD). And alcoholism, homelessness, and unemployment were rampant, leading to a skyrocketing divorce rate." This last fact is even more shocking when you consider that the rate (and approval) of divorce in that era was very low — approximately .03 divorces per 1,000 Americans.

Jobs were scarce, as the wartime economy had reversed itself. And in 1947 — after most GIs had returned home — over 400,000 Californians remained unemployed, and 767,000 claimed unemployment benefits, the second highest in the nation.

Our heroes needed help and the CACVSO endeavored to do a better job of assimilating them back into society and the workforce than had happened after WWI, when discharged veterans received little more than a \$60 allowance and a train ticket home.

With the passage of the GI Bill in 1944, returning veterans had access to education and training; loan guaranty for homes, farms or businesses; and unemployment pay. But how would they learn of and access these crucial benefits?

While the federal Veterans Administration (VA) was responsible for carrying out the law's key provisions, communicating these provisions — and offering the assistance needed to navigate the process — to four million veterans nationwide was not a task easily achieved from Washington, DC.

Fortunately, after the Civil War several midwestern states developed a system of designating county employees to educate and assist veterans in filing claims, realizing that the more local the assistance, the better the veteran is served. The system caught on and started to expand.

**Created in the wake of WWII, the CACVSO was born out of both necessity and patriotism. In 1945, the US welcomed home four million veterans.**

**After WWI, some counties established County Veteran Services Officers (CVSOs),** with Stanislaus County leading the way in 1924 — serving not only veterans of World War I, but also the Spanish-American War. San Bernardino County followed in 1926, Riverside in 1930, Ventura in 1931 and San Diego in 1933.

In 1939, permissive legislation was passed allowing counties to establish county veterans service offices if they wished to. Unfortunately, World War II broke out in 1941 before any additional CVSOs could be established.

However, with the end of World War II virtually every county created a CVSO to assist returning veterans, and California counties led the

nation in this effort. This same year (1945), these newly established CVSOs banded together to form the CACVSO and have been advocating for veterans and their families ever since. And in 1946, the State Legislature passed AB 14, giving CVSOs powers of a notary public.

During these past 75 years, other states and counties have kept pace with the development and growth of national veterans' advocacy groups. This system of CVSOs has grown to be the most widely used approach to delivering services to veterans. Twenty-four states and several Tribal Nations use the CVSO model to deliver benefits to veterans.

In 1989, the CACVSO joined its counterparts in seven other states to form the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO). A California CVSO served as the first President of the association. All twenty-four states that have CVSOs belong to NACVSO. Other members include one state with State Service Officers, three Tribal Nations and six protectorates and territories.

**With the end of World War II  
virtually every county created  
a CVSO to assist returning  
veterans, and California led  
nation in this effort.**

Right now, 56 of California's 58 counties have CVSOs to advocate not only for veterans and their families, but also for active duty, National Guard and military reserve members.

It's been three-quarters of a century since WWII spurred the creation of CACVSO, and this model system of service continues to expand and improve — resulting in the increased utilization of veterans benefits every year.



**V-J Day, August 15, 1945.** Victory Celebrations at Pearl Harbor, Territory of Hawaii. Sailors gather around the radio. Official U.S. Navy photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives. (2014/5/29).

**VETERANS & THE MILITARY — THEN AND NOW**

- In the early 1940s\*, the US had over 16 million active-duty personnel, or 12% of its population
- Today, we have approximately 1.3 million active-duty military, or less than one-half of 1% of our population
- Within the first seven years of the original GI Bill (1944), about eight million veterans had used the education benefits, with college and university degrees doubling between 1940-1950
- The latest Post 9/11 GI Bill (2009) has provided educational benefits to nearly 800,000 veterans (and their families), totaling \$12 billion
- The VA health care system, originally created during the Civil War, has grown from 54 hospitals in 1930 to 1,600 health care facilities today, including 144 VA Medical Centers and 1,232 outpatient sites of care of varying complexity

\*The Selective Service and Training Act (the "draft") was instituted in 1940







# THANK YOU CACVSO

FOR 75 YEARS OF HELPING VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Since 2005, California veterans service offices have accomplished so much:

- More than **1.46 million** veteran cases established in VetPro
- Over **728,000** claims awarded
- Over **\$3.19 billion** in monthly awards for veterans and their families
- More than **\$2.21 billion** in retroactive awards for veterans and their families
- Total of **\$5,788,175,422** awards granted

Even during the difficult circumstances in 2020, California Veterans Service Officers made almost 41,000 electronic claims submissions to the Department of Veterans Affairs, resulting in \$239,996,205 in new monetary grants to veterans and their families.

It is your dedication to support and assist our honorable veterans that is making a difference and changing lives every day. Thank you for letting VetPro help in that mission.

**We appreciate and thank you for all that you do!**

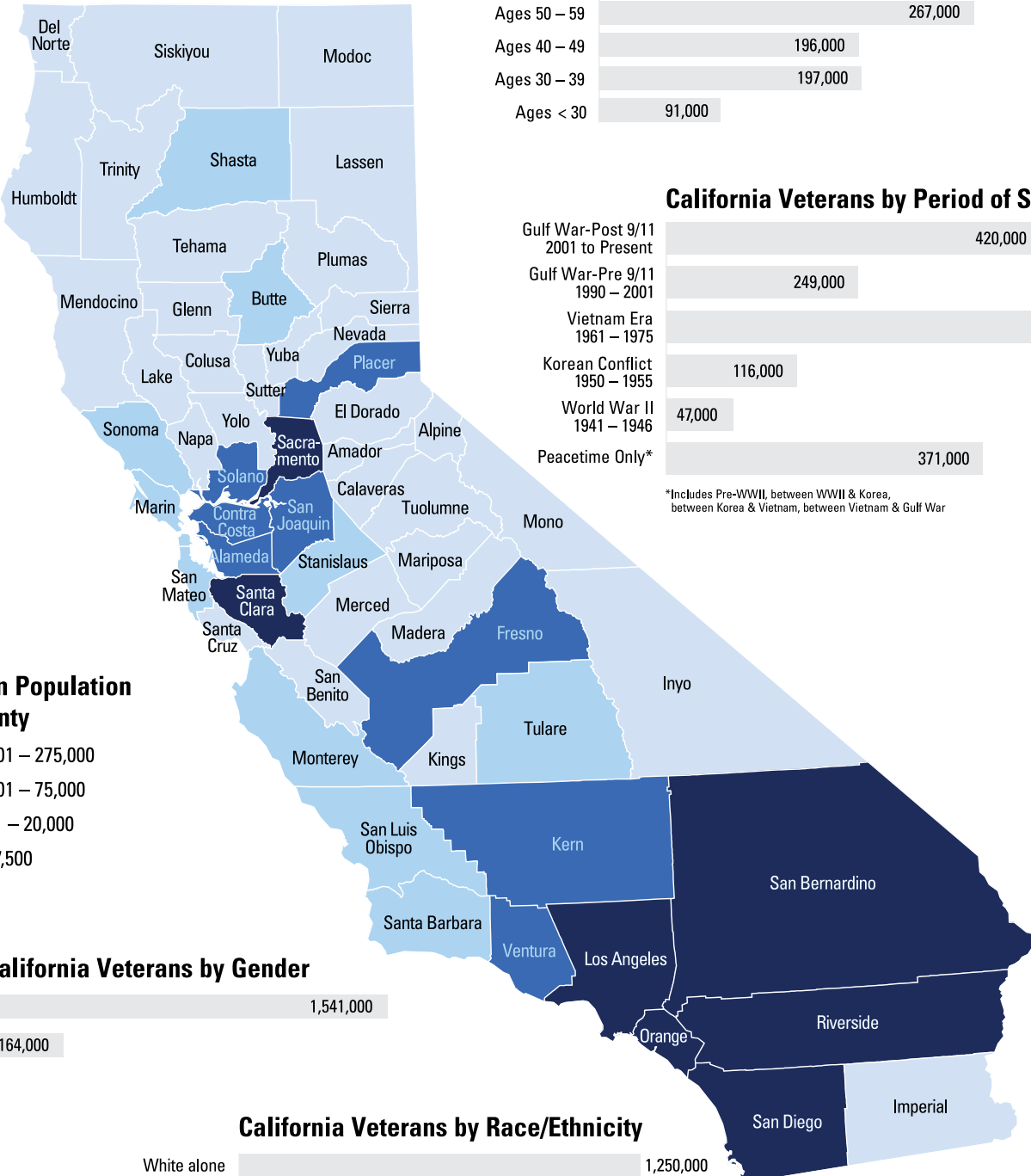
*- Your VetPro Team*



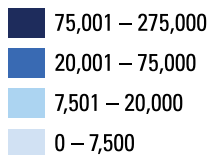
# California Veterans by the Numbers

Estimated By County as of September 30, 2019

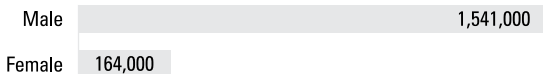
Source: USDVA VetPro 2018 (Tables 6L, 7L, 8L)



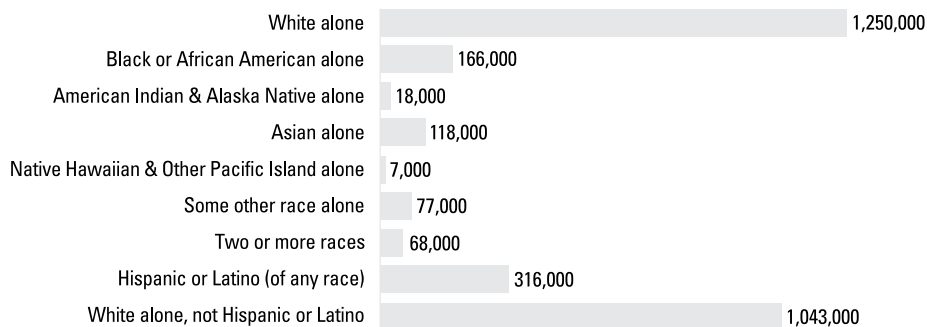
## Veteran Population by County



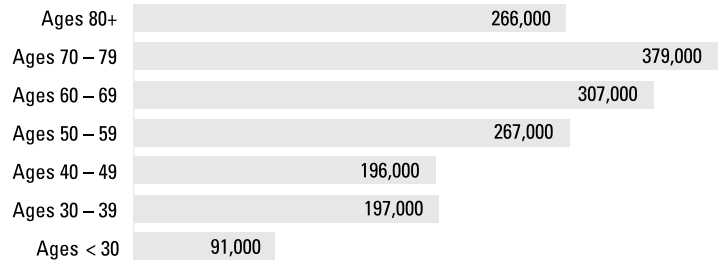
## California Veterans by Gender



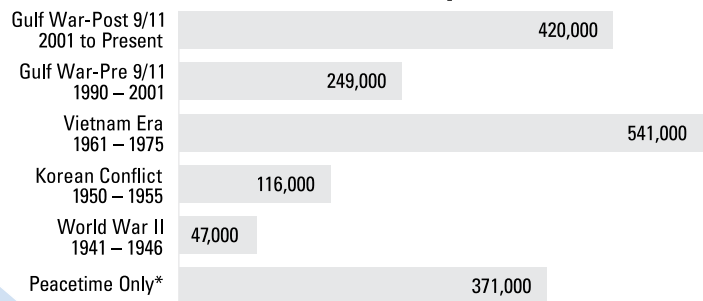
## California Veterans by Race/Ethnicity



## California Veterans by Age Group



## California Veterans by Period of Service



\*Includes Pre-WWII, between WWII & Korea, between Korea & Vietnam, between Vietnam & Gulf War



## WHY DO VETERANS NEED HELP FILING FOR BENEFITS?

Applying for Social Security and other federal benefits is a simple, uncomplicated process. The opposite is true of veterans' benefits. Without professional assistance, many veterans lose benefits they have earned by their service — often thousands of dollars a year.

Unlike other federal benefits, veterans' benefits are extremely individualized and must be applied for, otherwise benefits are lost. They depend on a wide variety of factors — when and where you served, if you served in combat, or served during a congressionally approved war-time period, the cause and severity of a disability, and other individual factors.

Additionally, Congress, federal courts and the Veterans Administration (VA) are constantly changing what benefits and services those who served in the military are eligible to receive.

That's why County Veterans Service Officers (CVSO) play such an important role.

Studies show that veterans receive more of the benefits owed them when they come to a professional for help. CVSOs do their jobs well. In fact, they turned \$42 million in county and state funding into more than \$542 million in benefits for the 2019-2020 fiscal year.

CVSOs are not remote paper-shuffling bureaucrats; they meet veterans face-to-face with an attitude that says, "We're on your side." In this relaxed atmosphere, veterans discuss their situation freely, and the CVSO is able to develop a claim that nets the largest possible benefit.

- CVSOs walk alongside veterans, guiding them through the complex process — as a real and caring person, not an anonymous voice at the end of a phone line.
- CVSOs also save the state money by connecting veterans with veteran treatment courts, homeless veterans' Stand Downs and other local services. They help find homeless veterans a warm place to sleep on a cold winter night. They get at-risk veterans mental health services today, not some distant tomorrow.

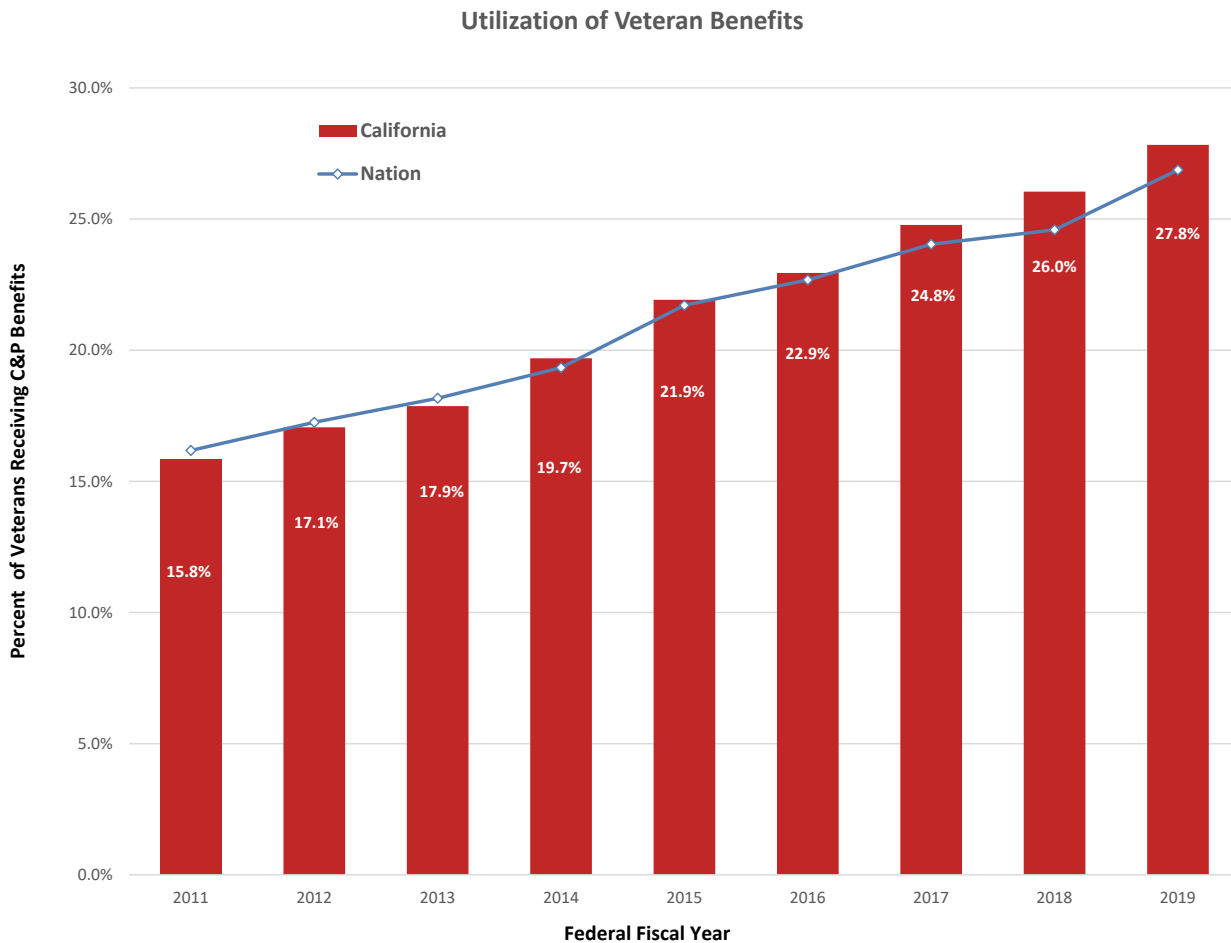
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**Veterans discuss their situation freely,  
and the CVSO is able to develop a claim  
that nets the largest possible benefit.**

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## IS CALIFORNIA MAKING THE MOST OF ITS VETERAN BENEFITS?

California's utilization of the primary monetary veteran benefits, disability Compensation and Pension (C&P), has made significant improvements following the last increase in state General Fund support of county veteran service office operations. Since 2011, utilization has increased from 15.8% to 27.8%; and while initially in that period the increases are consistent with national changes, following the infusion of additional state support California's utilization improved much faster than national rates.



Sources: USDVA Data by FY: "C&P by County", "Geographic Distribution of Expenditures", "VetPop"

We know from looking at best practices in other states that we can do better; **but why should the state be interested in providing additional support to the counties?** First and foremost, underfunding means that an estimated 65,000 California veterans are losing out on benefits they earned through their service; benefits that provide a living wage, medical coverage, access to mental health and rehabilitation services, education, affordable housing, and many other benefits — all at federal expense. Additionally, **there is an estimated \$1.1 billion of economic impact lost to the state each year by failing to bring these federal dollars into the economy.**





## FACTORS AFFECTING HOW MANY VETERANS RECEIVE MONETARY BENEFITS

Studies have shown:

- Claims filed with the assistance of a professional Veteran Service Representative (VSR), also called a County Veterans Service Officer or CVSO, have a higher approval rate than other claims.
- Claims filed with the assistance of a professional VSR result in higher disability ratings and thus higher monetary benefits for the veteran.
- The ratio of veterans to the number of professional VSRs in a state directly correlates to the state's utilization of federal monetary awards.
- California's ratio of veterans to VSRs lags other comparable states; the result being a limited supply of VSRs available to serve the largest veteran population of any state in the nation.

The limited access to the services of a professional VSR **adversely impacts**:

- The number of veterans properly served — roughly **65,000 veterans missing out on their benefits**.
- The veterans' quality of life — **\$1.1 billion in lost monetary benefits annually**.
- Access to life-changing services, such as medical care, rehabilitative services, mental health services and ongoing education.
- The balance of federal tax dollars flowing to and from California.
- The economic impact in communities where veterans reside.

## HOW DO WE FURTHER IMPROVE CALIFORNIA'S PERFORMANCE?

Additional improvement in veteran benefit utilization comes down to putting more professional VSRs — that is, CVSOs — in the field. California can do that by:

- Increasing state support of CVSOs to \$11 million — a goal set in statute many years ago.
- **Target the additional funding toward adding VSR positions** for CVSOs while allowing small or rural counties the latitude to tailor use of funds to local needs.
- Establishing a budgetary mechanism to ensure the state provides fifty percent of the cost of CVSO operations in future years.

## WHAT EVIDENCE IS THERE THAT MORE FUNDING WILL HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT?

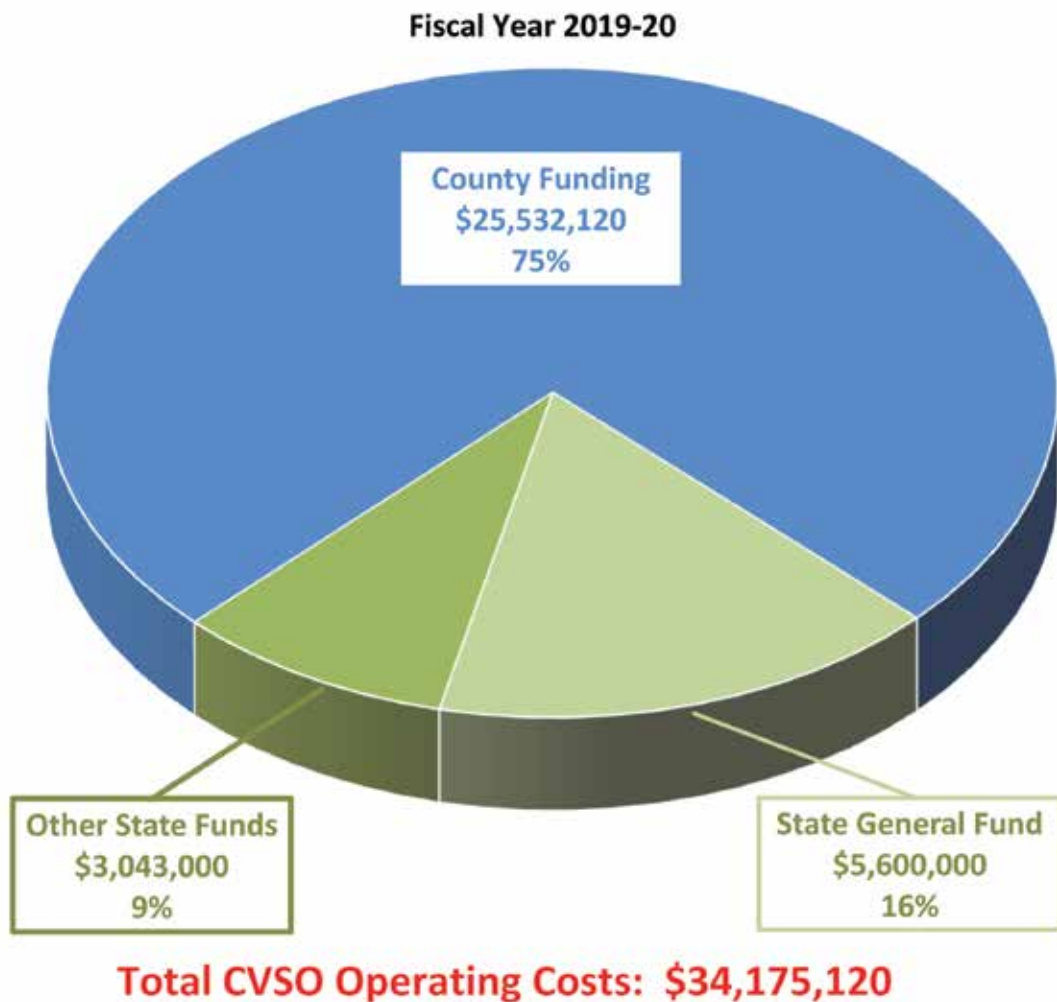
Since increasing the local assistance appropriation to the current \$5.6 million level:

- The state's utilization rate has increased from 15.8% (below the national average) to 27.8% (well above the national average).
- More than 100,000 veterans have been added to those receiving C&P benefits, despite a decrease in California's veteran population.
- The total amount of C&P benefits paid annually to California's veterans has increased from \$6.4 billion to \$8.4 billion.

California's CVSOs are key to ensuring that all veterans who have earned benefits through their service to the nation have access to those benefits. But counties cannot bear the entire burden for supporting CVSO operations, particularly when the state shares in the benefit of the economic impact generated by these benefits. If we truly want to support our veterans by connecting them to their federal benefits, then it's time for the state to deliver on its promise of becoming a full partner in support of CVSO operations.

## WHO FUNDS THE CVSOs?

County veterans service office operations are front funded with county funds, subject to reimbursement through various appropriations from state funds, including the General Fund, Veterans Service Office Fund, Mental Health Services Fund and MediCal cost avoidance reimbursements. Individual counties establish the size and extent of their own county veterans service office operations based upon local needs and their ability to fund the program. The state's General Fund appropriation in support of county veterans service office operations is primarily distributed on a pro rata basis utilizing performance measures established by the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet). Other funding is distributed based upon implementation of specific types of programs related to the intended use of these specialized funds. The chart below shows how county veterans service office operations were funded in fiscal year 2019-20.



Sources: CalVet NCC Data FY 19-20, 2019-20 Final Budget Summary

The state has long acknowledged that the cost of maintaining County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) should be shared equally between the counties and state. This history goes back to 1997 when, in order to track performance, Senate Bill 608 was enacted requiring CalVet to annually report the monetary benefits paid to veterans by the federal government that were directly attributable to the assistance of CVSOs. This legislation also required the Department of Finance

to consider an increase in the annual budget for support of CVSOs of up to \$5 million. In 2009, Senate Bill 419 raised this target amount to \$11 million. These dollar amounts represented approximately 50% of the total cost to operate county veterans service offices statewide in the respective years and, with current General Fund support for CVSOs set at \$5.6 million, have never been achieved.





In order to sustain the level of service being provided to veterans, counties have had to absorb the costs of the state's failure to fund the CVSO's operations at the level the Legislature has explicitly deemed appropriate.


During fiscal years 1995 to 2019, the state appropriated \$80.8 million from the General Fund for its share of the cost of the CVSOs. As a result of this investment, CVSOs were able to assist local veterans in obtaining over \$7.5 billion in new federal monies. This is a return on investment of about \$93 into the state's economy for every \$1 of state support to CVSOs. Furthermore, the \$7.5 billion only reflects the incremental monetary benefits each year, not the cumulative amount for ongoing benefits. Most of these reported benefits are ongoing, and veterans continue to receive those benefits for the rest of their lives. This means the total economic impact of CVSO operations is much higher than \$7.5 billion.

It is critical that the CVSOs receive a steady stream of funding as many of the more than 20,000 veterans returning to California annually are not aware of how to access the federal and state

benefits that are available to them. Furthermore, many veterans from prior eras are not aware that they may still be eligible for state and federal veteran benefits despite the time that has passed since their discharge from service. The result is that there continues to be many underserved veterans and dependents who are not aware of the federal and state benefits available to them because of their military service or do not know how to access those benefits.

Studies which looked at states with similar populations and veterans service operations show that higher staffing at county veterans service offices results in larger amounts of federal funds to veterans, both in the aggregate and to the individual veteran. Another independent study showed that by using trained professional Veteran Service Representatives (VSRs) when applying for benefits the claimants receive higher, more comprehensive awards.

All these reasons more than justify state support for county veteran service office operations. It is past time to provide adequate funding for the services veterans need to fully access the benefits they have earned.



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SAN DIEGO MILITARY ADVISORY COUNCIL

2020  
SAN DIEGO MILITARY ECONOMIC IMPACT REPORT

NAVAL INFORMATION WARFARE SYSTEMS COMMAND ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDY

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**Help us help those that have served!**

*The SDMAC Foundation is a 501c3 serving the San Diego military, military family, and veteran communities through outreach, education and skills support, and transition initiatives.*

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## FINANCIAL IMPACT OF VETERANS CLAIMS BY COUNTY

The monetary veteran benefit statistics presented on the following pages provide data on federal benefits being paid in each California county, as well as the new federal veteran benefits obtained with the assistance of County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs).

The left section of the table, "Compensation & Pension Paid by USDVA," shows the same metrics at the county level as used when comparing California to other states. This C&P utilization rate is the percentage of veterans receiving compensation or pension benefits within the county for federal fiscal year 2019. This part of the table also shows the total compensation and pension paid, and the average amount each beneficiary receives for those benefits within the county. These metrics reflect the overall health of all veterans service programs that help connect veterans to their earned benefits within that county, both public and private.

The right section of the table, "New Awards Attributable to CVSOs," provides the monetary value of new or increased monetary benefits paid to eligible veterans and their dependents during the state's fiscal year 2019-20. These amounts are directly attributable to the activities and efforts of the CVSOs. **In total, the CVSOs accounted for over \$542 million in new federal veteran benefits being brought into California's economy.** Given that the state only provided \$5.6 million in general fund support to CVSO operations, **this represents a return on investment of \$97 for every \$1 of general fund monies spent.** It should be noted that "New Awards Attributable to CVSOs" reports only the new or increased benefits obtained in that fiscal year, not the cumulative benefits and, as such, is a reflection of the continuing effort of CVSOs to assist veterans in obtaining the benefits they have earned — this is truly a "what have you done for me lately" metric.

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**In total, the CVSOs accounted for over \$542 million in new federal benefits being brought into California's economy.**

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**Monetary Impact of Veteran Claims - By County  
Fiscal Year 2019-20**

Compensation & Pension (C&P) Paid by USDVA						New Awards Attributable to CVSOs (Note 4)		
County	Veteran Population (Note 1)	Veterans with C&P Claims (Note 2)	% of Veterans with C&P Claims	C&P Dollars Paid to Veterans (Note 3)	Average C&P Award paid to Claimants	New Claims Submitted by CVSO	New Awards Obtained by CVSO	Average New Award Obtained by CVSO
ALAMEDA	52,647	12,455	23.7%	\$192,192,906	\$15,431	811	\$2,946,151	\$3,633
ALPINE	90	11	12.2%	\$246,560	\$22,415	No CVSO		
AMADOR	3,548	759	21.4%	\$15,395,214	\$20,284	231	\$1,425,420	\$6,171
BUTTE	15,074	3,685	24.4%	\$69,607,121	\$18,889	1,700	\$7,625,858	\$4,486
CALAVERAS	4,432	870	19.6%	\$19,771,127	\$22,725	374	\$971,176	\$2,597
COLUSA	850	202	23.8%	\$4,562,974	\$22,589	161	\$2,733,285	\$16,977
CONTRA COSTA	49,149	10,737	21.8%	\$190,579,072	\$17,750	3,103	\$23,543,252	\$7,587
DEL NORTE	2,093	568	27.1%	\$12,474,214	\$21,962	190	\$630,524	\$3,319
EL DORADO	13,891	3,001	21.6%	\$61,412,357	\$20,464	737	\$4,426,477	\$6,006
FRESNO	38,790	11,954	30.8%	\$208,405,403	\$17,434	3,110	\$12,980,299	\$4,174
GLENN	1,415	349	24.7%	\$6,144,549	\$17,606	76	\$454,247	\$5,977
HUMBOLDT	9,641	2,238	23.2%	\$45,660,179	\$20,402	1,024	\$3,119,331	\$3,046
IMPERIAL	5,694	2,084	36.6%	\$35,761,957	\$17,160	680	\$4,136,866	\$6,084
INYO-MONO	2,122	503	23.7%	\$7,896,333	\$15,698	104	\$566,697	\$5,667

**Notes:** See last page of "Monetary Impact of Veteran Claims - By County"

County	CVSO	Telephone	Email
Alameda	Anthony Marchante	510-577-1926	anthony.marchante@acgov.org
Alpine	Due to low veteran population, there is no CVSO		
Amador	Terry Sanders	209-223-6476	tsanders@amadorgov.org
Butte	Dennis Whitt	530-552-6608	dwhitt@buttecounty.net
Calaveras	Brian Galacia	209-754-6910	veteranservices.calaverasgov.us
Colusa	Don Parsons	530-458-0388	Don.Parsons@countyofcolusa.com
Contra Costa	Nathan Johnson	925-313-1481	nathan@vs.cccounty.us
Del Norte	Aaron Goodwin	707-464-2154	agoodwin@co.del-norte.ca.us
El Dorado	Chele Beretz	530-621-5963	chele.beretz@edcgv.us
Fresno	David Rose	559-600-5436	drose@fresnocountyca.gov
Glenn	Brandon Thompson	530-934-6524	bthompson@countyofglenn.net
Humboldt	Rena Maveety	707-445-7611	maveety@co.humboldt.ca.us
Imperial	Federico Garcia	442-265-3200	federicogarcia@co.imperial.ca.us
Inyo-Mono	Gordon Greene	760-873-7850	icvso@inyocounty.us



**Monetary Impact of Veteran Claims - By County  
Fiscal Year 2019-20**

Compensation & Pension (C&P) Paid by USDVA						New Awards Attributable to CVSOs (Note 4)		
County	Veteran Population (Note 1)	Veterans with C&P Claims (Note 2)	% of Veterans with C&P Claims	C&P Dollars Paid to Veterans (Note 3)	Average C&P Award paid to Claimants	New Claims Submitted by CVSO	New Awards Obtained by CVSO	Average New Award Obtained by CVSO
KERN	39,511	12,115	30.7%	\$217,026,146	\$17,914	3,813	\$17,867,075	\$4,686
KINGS	10,217	4,105	40.2%	\$51,075,853	\$12,442	847	\$3,680,318	\$4,345
LAKE	5,084	1,575	31.0%	\$34,012,284	\$21,595	1,436	\$6,226,093	\$4,336
LASSEN	2,073	617	29.8%	\$10,043,227	\$16,278	104	\$3,599	\$35
LOS ANGELES	286,709	73,083	25.5%	\$1,258,609,836	\$17,222	11,758	\$37,829,613	\$3,217
MADERA	7,327	1,954	26.7%	\$40,715,219	\$20,837	457	\$2,375,206	\$5,197
MARIN	10,133	1,854	18.3%	\$30,154,283	\$16,264	476	\$2,661,823	\$5,592
MARIPOSA	1,638	368	22.5%	\$6,821,826	\$18,538	27	\$160,695	\$5,952
MENDOCINO	5,531	1,398	25.3%	\$30,313,913	\$21,684	867	\$4,401,094	\$5,076
MERCED	9,429	2,884	30.6%	\$47,989,907	\$16,640	1,323	\$3,604,328	\$2,724
MODOC	863	156	18.1%	\$3,732,784	\$23,928	36	\$586,884	\$16,302
MONTEREY	20,674	6,342	30.7%	\$110,316,273	\$17,395	1,624	\$13,987,982	\$8,613
NAPA	7,174	1,878	26.2%	\$35,412,999	\$18,857	915	\$4,517,710	\$4,937
NEVADA	8,643	1,851	21.4%	\$40,357,781	\$21,803	948	\$5,097,171	\$5,377

**Notes:** See last page of "Monetary Impact of Veteran Claims - By County"

County	CVSO	Telephone	Email
Kern	Joshua Dhanens	661-868-7300	jdhanens@kerncounty.com
Kings	Scott Holwell	559-852-2669	scott.holwell@co.kings.ca.us
Lake	Saul Sanabria	707-263-2384	Saul.Sanabria@lakecountyca.gov
Lassen	Chris Mancebo	530-251-8192	CMancebo@co.lassen.ca.us
Los Angeles	Ruth A. Wong	213-765-9678	rwong@mva.lacounty.gov
Madera	Joshua Christopherson	559-675-7766	Josh.Christopherson@maderacounty.com
Marin	Sean Stephens	415-473-6193	SaStephens@marincounty.org
Mariposa	Bob Johns	209-966-3696	veterans@mariposacounty.org
Mendocino	Ulyses Lopez	707-463-4226	lopezu@mendocinocounty.org
Merced	Ralph Silva Rodriguez	209-385-7588	Ralph.SilvaRodriguez@countyofmerced.com
Modoc	Harry Hitchings	530-233-6209	harryhitchings@co.modoc.ca.us
Monterey	Jason Cameron	831-647-7613	cameronj@co.monterey.ca.us
Napa	Dell Pratt	707-253-4558	dell.pratt@countyofnapa.org
Nevada	David O. West II	530-265-1446	David.West@co.nevada.ca.us

**Monetary Impact of Veteran Claims - By County  
Fiscal Year 2019-20**

Compensation & Pension (C&P) Paid by USDVA						New Awards Attributable to CVSOs (Note 4)		
County	Veteran Population (Note 1)	Veterans with C&P Claims (Note 2)	% of Veterans with C&P Claims	C&P Dollars Paid to Veterans (Note 3)	Average C&P Award paid to Claimants	New Claims Submitted by CVSO	New Awards Obtained by CVSO	Average New Award Obtained by CVSO
ORANGE	119,520	27,187	22.7%	\$432,406,242	\$15,905	3,317	\$22,286,482	\$6,719
PLACER	26,891	6,036	22.4%	\$129,274,897	\$21,417	1,564	\$5,315,527	\$3,399
PLUMAS	1,845	491	26.6%	\$8,109,805	\$16,517	198	\$413,393	\$2,088
RIVERSIDE	120,470	35,997	29.9%	\$823,531,173	\$22,878	8,255	\$39,852,898	\$4,828
SACRAMENTO	86,963	21,946	25.2%	\$405,555,583	\$18,480	2,356	\$5,623,033	\$2,387
SAN BENITO	2,540	648	25.5%	\$15,004,372	\$23,155	312	\$2,727,375	\$8,742
SAN BERNARDINO	99,090	28,945	29.2%	\$543,848,834	\$18,789	12,319	\$67,099,129	\$5,447
SAN DIEGO	255,315	93,923	36.8%	\$1,466,153,670	\$15,610	11,491	\$29,736,043	\$2,588
SAN FRANCISCO	25,777	5,735	22.2%	\$81,425,691	\$14,198	2,101	\$6,286,963	\$2,992
SAN JOAQUIN	32,370	7,917	24.5%	\$156,574,652	\$19,777	2,552	\$11,458,699	\$4,490
SAN LUIS OBISPO	17,798	3,981	22.4%	\$73,239,781	\$18,397	1,899	\$12,155,030	\$6,401
SAN MATEO	24,897	4,859	19.5%	\$76,264,303	\$15,695	815	\$6,932,690	\$8,506
SANTA BARBARA	21,080	6,075	28.8%	\$98,378,142	\$16,194	2,017	\$11,276,367	\$5,591
SANTA CLARA	57,462	11,796	20.5%	\$181,566,760	\$15,392	1,956	\$16,249,734	\$8,308

**Notes:** See last page of "Monetary Impact of Veteran Claims - By County"

County	CVSO	Telephone	Email
Orange	Nancy G. Toscano-Cicone	714-480-6555	nancy.toscano-cicone@occr.ocgov.com
Placer	Derrick Oliveira	916-780-3294	doliveira@placer.ca.gov
Plumas/Sierra	Shawn Bondon	530-283-6275	RobertBondon@countyofplumas.com
Riverside	Grant Gautsche	951-955-3060	gautsche@rivco.org
Sacramento	Rochelle Arnold	916-874-6811	arnoldro@saccounty.net
San Benito	Jason Cameron	831-647-7613	CameronJ@co.monterey.ca.us
San Bernardino	Frank Guevara	909-382-3290	Frank.guevara@va.sbcounty.gov
San Diego	Wilfred Quintong	858-694-3222	wilfred.quintong@sdcounty.ca.gov
San Francisco	Alfred Sims	415-934-4200	Alfred.sims@sfgov.org
San Joaquin	Virginia Wimmer	209-468-2916	vwimmer@sjgov.org
San Luis Obispo	Morgan Boyd	805-781-5766	mboyd@co.slo.ca.us
San Mateo	Ed Kiryczun	650-802-6598	EKiryczun@smcgov.org
Santa Barbara	Rhonda Murphy	805-346-7160	rmurphy@co.santa-barbara.ca.us
Santa Clara	David Till	408-918-4980	David.till@vets.sccgov.org





## Monetary Impact of Veteran Claims - By County Fiscal Year 2019-20

Compensation & Pension (C&P) Paid by USDVA						New Awards Attributable to CVSOs (Note 4)		
County	Veteran Population (Note 1)	Veterans with C&P Claims (Note 2)	% of Veterans with C&P Claims	C&P Dollars Paid to Veterans (Note 3)	Average C&P Award paid to Claimants	New Claims Submitted by CVSO	New Awards Obtained by CVSO	Average New Award Obtained by CVSO
SANTA CRUZ	10,040	2,356	23.5%	\$50,159,940	\$21,290	1,070	\$8,058,329	\$7,531
SHASTA	14,434	3,996	27.7%	\$93,776,877	\$23,468	1,467	\$9,941,192	\$6,777
SIERRA	251	49	19.5%	\$903,245	\$18,434	No CVSO		
SISKIYOU	3,879	924	23.8%	\$18,734,244	\$20,275	356	\$2,275,479	\$6,392
SOLANO	34,094	12,598	37.0%	\$252,825,140	\$20,069	4,256	\$39,748,766	\$9,339
SONOMA	25,308	5,536	21.9%	\$103,276,697	\$18,655	1,564	\$14,270,121	\$9,124
STANISLAUS	22,213	5,562	25.0%	\$112,441,547	\$20,216	2,693	\$17,710,273	\$6,576
TEHAMA	4,842	1,099	22.7%	\$20,000,807	\$18,199	824	\$2,314,611	\$2,809
TRINITY	1,050	255	24.3%	\$5,357,943	\$21,012	17	\$140,118	\$8,242
TULARE	15,493	5,295	34.2%	\$87,953,020	\$16,611	1,552	\$8,042,390	\$5,182
TUOLUMNE	4,976	1,138	22.9%	\$23,654,657	\$20,786	538	\$2,257,788	\$4,197
VENTURA	41,135	10,138	24.6%	\$191,037,422	\$18,844	2,564	\$17,365,819	\$6,773
YOLO	8,423	2,295	27.2%	\$39,347,307	\$17,145	897	\$2,850,325	\$3,178
YUBA-SUTTER	11,980	4,342	36.2%	\$77,420,443	\$17,831	1,750	\$11,319,663	\$6,468
<b>STATEWIDE</b>	<b>1,704,579</b>	<b>474,320</b>	<b>27.8%</b>	<b>\$8,354,915,491</b>	<b>\$17,615</b>	<b>107,632</b>	<b>\$542,267,409</b>	<b>\$5,038</b>

**Notes:**

1. Veteran population estimates, as of September 30, 2019, published by USDVA National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics as "VetPop 2018".
2. The number of compensation and pension beneficiaries in the county as reported by the USDVA National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics as "FY 2019 Compensation and Pension by County". These cases are the result of all veteran service organizations or individual veterans who filed claims (i.e. they are not CVSO unique). The sum of the individual counties may not equal statewide total due to veterans whose county of residence is unknown per USDVA. Pension cases estimated based on historical utilization because USDVA had not released pension data by publication deadline.
3. The total amount of compensation and pension benefits paid to beneficiaries in the county as reported by the USDVA National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics as "FY 2019 Geographic Distribution of Expenditures". These amounts are the total amount paid by USDVA for C&P benefits to claimants with addresses in the respective county. They are the cumulative result of all veteran service organizations or individual veterans who filed claims (i.e. they are not CVSO unique).
4. These amounts are the new or increased benefits obtained by the CVSO as reported in CalVet's Annual Report to the Legislature "Monetary Benefits Attributable to the Assistance Of County Veterans Service Offices" for Fiscal Year 2019-20. They do not include any awards attributable to other veteran service organizations or individual filers.

County	CVSO	Telephone	Email
Santa Cruz	Dean Kaufman	831-454-7276	dean.kaufman@santacruzcounty.us
Shasta	Celestina Traver	530-225-5616	ctraver@co.shasta.ca.us
Siskiyou	Tom Jackson	530-842-8010	thomas.jackson@siskiyousheriff.org
Solano	Ted Puntillo	707-784-6590	tepuntillo@solanocounty.com
Sonoma	Mark G. Orlando	707-565-5960	morlando@schsd.org
Stanislaus	Ryan Kegley	209-558-7380	Kegleyry@stancounty.com
Tehama	Andrew Norwood	530-529-3664	Anorwood@co.tehama.ca.us
Trinity	Jennifer Dobbs	530-623-3975	jdobbs@trinitycounty.org
Tulare	Ken Cruickshank	559-713-2880	kcruicks@tularecounty.ca.gov
Tuolumne	Debora Kay Esque	209-533-6280	DEsque@co.tuolumne.ca.us
Ventura	Tammy Bender	805-477-5155	tammy.bender@ventura.org
Yolo	Salvador Torres	530-406-4850	Salvador.Torres@yolocounty.org
Yuba-Sutter	Marvin King, Jr.	530-749-6710	HHSD-Veteran@co.yuba.ca.us

## CALIFORNIA CVSOS DURING COVID



# ADAPT AND OVERCOME

**COVID-19 has dominated 2020.** No aspect of our lives has escaped its effects — including the work performed by our County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs). But in the words of our first President and Commanding General of the Continental Army, George Washington, “The harder the conflict, the greater the triumph.”

And COVID-19 definitely presented its share of struggles for CVSOs and those they serve. About a week after then-President Trump declared COVID-19 a national emergency, the state of California issued a Statewide Stay-at-Home order on March 19, effectively shutting down county veterans service office operations as we’ve known them.

Up until that point, these offices had operated predominantly via in-person outreach and meetings with veterans where an exchange and review of hard copy documents took place. As that came to a crashing halt, CVSOs and their staffs moved quickly to establish new protocols to serve the veterans and families depending on them.

While some activities had to be temporarily suspended due to health considerations — such as in-person outreach programs to the incarcerated or homeless — others were reorganized and adapted to the “new normal.”

Here are some examples of how California’s CVSOs adapted and triumphed against the obstacles COVID presented — to continue serving California’s veterans, while protecting public health:



- Transitioned from in-person claims processing to email, scanned and faxed claims.
- Invested in electronic document signing programs (i.e., FingerINK, etc.) to assist veterans in completing required claims online.
- Installed drop-boxes outside of their offices for veterans to leave important documents and assigned clerks to pick up the documents and mail daily.
  - Created “Virtual VSOs” allowing face-to-face meetings with veterans and CVSOs who were teleworking, as well as virtual outreach to county jails, senior living facilities and other outside agencies.
    - Obtained mobile workstations, printers, hotspots, mobile phone data stipends and other necessary equipment for employees now teleworking to ensure that they were fully equipped to continue their work on behalf of veterans.
    - Transitioned in-person staff meetings (and ongoing trainings) to Zoom.
    - At least one county will soon have the capability for veterans to complete certain VA forms via the county website.
  - Another county replaced its in-person outreach with a new “Welcome Home” program, sending letters and phoning all newly separated servicemembers using data provided by CalVet.
- For those offices that eventually were allowed to re-open (limited), saw veterans by appointment only (to limit the number of people in the office), limited their time in the office to five minutes, socially distanced, and offered masks.

Despite the tremendous logistical barriers presented by the pandemic, California’s CVSO’s adapted and overcame. And while claim activity during 2020 was understandably lower, the actual dollar amounts of retroactive and lump sum benefits CVSOs were able to obtain for the California veterans they serve were higher this year than last — with a statewide increase of \$11 million in retroactive benefits and \$1.5 million in lump sum benefits.

**CVSOs and their staffs moved quickly to establish new protocols to serve the veterans and families depending on them.**

## VETERANS AND COVID

- California is home to 1.7 million veterans
- 17,590 California veterans have tested positive for COVID-19, with 650 known deaths
- There are currently 546 veterans with active cases of COVID-19
- The VA has vaccinated 65,628 California veterans through its healthcare systems



## CONNECTING VETERANS TO BENEFITS

### REAL STORIES, REAL LIVES CHANGED

California is home to over 1.7 million veterans, many of whom still do not know that they're eligible for federal Department of Veterans Administration (VA) benefits and healthcare. Yet awareness is only half the battle; navigating the claims process is the other.

Due to complex and bewildering claim forms and ever-changing rules and regulations, County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) play a critical role in connecting these veterans to the benefits they've earned.

While each veteran's situation is unique, the following stories provide a sampling of how California's veterans are assisted, supported and outstandingly served by California's CVSO's every day.

#### **SOLANO COUNTY — MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA**

In 2012, a woman came to the county veterans service office simply to get a required form to obtain the veteran description on her drivers' license. In reviewing her records, the County Veteran Services Officer (CVSO) noted that she had only served in the US Air Force for 14 months beginning in 1977. In addition, she appeared nervous and guarded. The CVSO was supportive, asked if she was alright and encouraged her to come back to the office if he could help her further.

She returned later and shared her story of being raped while in the Air Force in 1977. She had filed a VA claim for the rape, but it had been denied in 1978. The visit began a years' long quest to appeal the original claim for the rape, as well as new claims for physical injuries and PTSD while in the service. Her military and VA records were not initially available, but she and the CVSO persisted. It took the intervention of her local Congressman, but her military records were obtained and the CVSO has able to assist her in overcoming all VA roadblocks and completing all VA forms. In 2013, the VA approved her claim for physical injuries and PTSD, but not for the original 1978 claim of the sexual assault.

With the help of the CVSO, she continued to appeal the original VA denial and in 2020, the VA finally accepted her appeal and awarded benefits from the original 1978 claim. She has since written a short book about her experience, including the assistance of the CVSO. The book is entitled "*Hollowed Soldier.*"

#### **SACRAMENTO COUNTY — CVSO ASSISTS MARINE'S WIDOW TO RECEIVE DEPENDENCY INDEMNITY COMPENSATION FROM VA**

The widow of a retired Marine Corps Vietnam veteran had applied to the VA for Dependency Indemnity Compensation (DIC) and burial benefits in 2018. She was denied because the veteran had passed away from pancreatic cancer but was only rated by the VA for Diabetes Mellitus Type 2, hearing loss, and tinnitus. The Sacramento CVSO took on her case, researching the link between diabetes and pancreatic cancer. CVSO staff tracked down the original certifying official who signed the death certificate and requested an amendment to add diabetes as a contributing factor to the veteran's death. The CVSO drove the widow to the County Recorder's Office to pick up the amended death certificate and then submitted her supplemental claim to the VA. Subsequently, the VA granted her DIC compensation of \$1,357 per month, as well as a burial allowance of \$2,000.

#### **LOS ANGELES COUNTY — CVSOs WORKING TOGETHER WITH OTHER SERVICE PROVIDERS**

An eight-year Army veteran received an Other-Than-Honorable (OTH) discharge after being declared Absent Without Leave (AWOL) when his five-year-old daughter died from pneumonia while he was serving in Alaska. He thought that the Army had granted him an extension for leave while he was in Los Angeles to attend to his daughter's burial, but he later found that the extension had not been granted, leading to being



declared AWOL. He became depressed and started self-medicating; his family broke apart, his wife left him, and he was a single father to his 18-month-old twins. Eventually he ended up on the streets and then in the Los Angeles County Jail system.

Upon release, he tried to turn his life around. Volunteers of America helped him with housing, then referred him to the Los Angeles County CVS0. The CVS0 staff submitted documentation for an upgrade on his discharge, which was successful, then encouraged him to apply to the VA's Student Worker Program. Goodwill Southern California helped him meet his child support obligations and other members of this collaborative effort reminded the veteran that it wasn't about who he had been but who he was now that mattered. The veteran completed his BS degree in Human Science with an emphasis on Family and Children. He now works with the CVS0 office as a student worker, and is one of the few student workers to ever become certified as a Veteran Service Representative (VSR).

### **NAPA COUNTY — RURAL VETERAN RECEIVES MUCH-NEEDED HELP WITH DIALYSIS TRANSPORTATION COSTS**

Eighty-six-year-old Marine veteran, Jim, served during the Korean War. He is now confined to a wheelchair and requires dialysis treatment three times per week. He and his 83-year-old wife, Anne, live in a picturesque yet isolated valley in Napa County, and the weekly transportation costs to his dialysis — which were 'out-of-pocket' — were placing the couple in tremendous financial strain. The stress and financial burden led Anne to seek assistance from Comprehensive Services for Older Adults (CSOA).

During an initial assessment, the Public Health Nurse quickly realized that Jim might be eligible for benefits from the Dept of Veterans Affairs (VA) and arranged a consultation with the County Veterans Service Officer (CVS0), who discovered Jim's monthly VA compensation covered less than 10% of the actual medical transportation costs. After collaboration on care options and VA eligibility, a claim was filed resulting in Jim receiving a monthly increase of 16 times the previous amount. In addition, the retroactive payment covered almost a full year of his transportation costs to his dialysis treatments. Jim is now fully connected to his VA benefits and the financial strain that had prompted Anne to contact the CSOA has been eliminated.

### **PLACER COUNTY — PRE-COVID WALK-IN CLINICS HELP MORE THAN 150 VETERANS IN JANUARY**

Prior to the pandemic closures, the Placer County veterans service office held its first-ever veterans services 'blitz' events, where veterans from across the county received walk-in support for filing veterans claims. One was a Coast Guard Captain heading into retirement and just starting to navigate the veterans' benefits process. Another was a young Air Force veteran filing for disability while attending school to embark on a new career. A third was a former anti-tank gunner with the Marine Corps who had left the military years earlier but was just starting to explore what benefits might be available. These are just a few examples of the 151 veterans who received help applying for benefits over the course of four blitz events in Rocklin and Auburn, including two events on Saturdays designed to be more accessible to the county's many working veterans.

### **RIVERSIDE COUNTY — CVS0 OFFICE PARTNERS WITH OTHER COUNTY HUMAN ASSISTANCE AGENCIES TO ACHIEVE "FUNCTIONAL ZERO" VETERANS' HOMELESSNESS**

The Riverside County CVS0 was part of the Veteran Assistance Leadership of Riverside County (VALOR) initiative, a partnership established by the County Board of Supervisors with a variety of other entities in the county — including the Housing Authority, Social Services, University Health System, Sheriff's Department, Probation Department, housing providers, and local governments — with the goal of reaching the federal benchmark known as "functional zero." The benchmark is reached when homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring and all veterans have access to the resources they need to move quickly to permanent housing. VALOR succeeded in placing more than 1,100 homeless veterans into permanent housing. While some veterans do still become homeless, there is a robust housing-crisis response system in place which can identify and link them immediately with resources. As the tenth most populous county in the country, Riverside is the largest county to date to achieve "functional zero."

## **SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY — VETERANS SERVICES COLLABORATIVE**

The San Luis Obispo County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) work together with other veteran groups and providers in the county. The SLO Veterans Services Collaborative meets monthly to interact with the more than 150 separate government and non-government organizations that participate in the community's service programs. The collaborative does not service veterans directly; its mission is to communicate and coordinate the programs and services to better serve veterans in the community. When COVID restrictions were implemented, the collaborative did what was taught in the military: improvise, adapt and overcome. They did not cancel Resource Fairs but instead took them virtual with 24 hours of webinars presenting resources for employment, health, housing and education. They did not give up on monthly meetings but adapted to Zoom and continued to provide information and coordination that the collaborative's partners could not otherwise receive. They did not give up on supporting veterans and found a \$10,000 grant that provided grocery gift cards for veterans facing food insecurity.

## **MONTEREY COUNTY — DEATH CERTIFICATE AND DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION**

A veteran who served 10 years in the Army and was medically discharged in 1987 had suffered from knee and foot pain for over 30 years. While his wife had encouraged him to seek help at the VA, the veteran resisted; he felt that other veterans needed the help more than he did. However, the pain continued to worsen to the point he was unable to exercise, walk, or sit comfortably. His condition led to significant weight gain, sleep apnea, and high blood pressure. He suffered this way for 15 years, at which time he did begin receiving minimum compensation. Fifteen years later, when his health continued to decline, he went to the VA to resubmit his claim. He was then diagnosed with congestive heart failure and prescribed different medications. He subsequently suffered a mild heart attack and eventually a fatal heart attack. His wife was devastated — both emotionally and financially — and submitted paperwork to increase the family's VA benefits, which was denied, leaving her and her children only \$250 per month to live on. She contacted the Monterey County veterans service office for help, where staff reviewed the death certificate and noticed that it did not clearly indicate that her husband's death was a direct result of military incurred injuries and provided guidance on how to have his death certificate changed to reflect his military-caused health issues. The first attempt to amend the certificate was denied. Undeterred, the CVSO continued to work with the wife to get the support she and her children needed. After two years, the wife received a letter stating that she would receive increased monthly Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) as well as retroactive benefits based on the date of the original application.

## **SHASTA COUNTY — DISCHARGE UPGRADE AND VA BENEFITS**

An elderly homeless veteran visited the Shasta County veterans service office with questions regarding a letter he had received from the Army's Board of Corrections for Military Records (BCMR) in response to his request to have his discharge upgraded from "Under Honorable Conditions" to "Honorable." The veteran had recently been diagnosed with wet macular degeneration in both eyes. He was having difficulty reading the letter and asked the County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO) for assistance. The letter was notifying the veteran that his case was under review by the BCMR and a review of his service medical records had been conducted. There was no further action required on the part of the veteran regarding his original request; however, the CVSO noticed that the BCMR's medical opinion contained information that could also provide solid ground for a service-connected disability claim. The CVSO worked with the veteran to file the claim with the VA and the veteran was subsequently granted a 100% service-connected disability rating, providing him an ongoing \$3,000 per month. The veteran was also able to find housing, which led to greater access to medical services at the local VA clinic. The BCMR also granted the veteran's request for an upgrade in the character of his service from "Under Honorable Conditions" to "Honorable."

## **KERN COUNTY — CVSO STAFF SAVED WIDOW FROM \$56,000 BACK CHARGE FROM VA**

After receiving a VA survivor's pension since 2011, a 78-year-old widow attempted to update the VA regarding a change to her in-home care providers. The information she provided mentioned a grandchild not already known to the VA, which prompted the VA to request additional information. After months of confusing correspondence, the widow became frustrated with the VA and asked that her pension be



terminated. However, this request, coupled with the change in medical expenses reported earlier in the year, took months to take effect. During this time, she was still receiving the pension benefit. When the VA later made a final decision, it led to a \$52,000 overpayment debt going back to 2011. Luckily, the widow's granddaughter noticed the debt letter and reached out to the Kern County CVSO. After reviewing the VA correspondence and the surviving spouse's claims file, the CVSO appealed the VA's decision and reapplied for the survivor pension. Working with the widow's granddaughter, the CVSO was able to provide medical expense reports from 2011 through 2020 demonstrating the expenses paid by the widow, who had kept the receipts for the care she had received. In December of 2020, the VA finished its adjudication resulting in a reinstatement of the widow's pension benefits and a recalculation of her past benefits, ultimately awarding her over \$56,000. This covered the proposed overpayment and netted the widow an additional \$4,000 in pension benefits she would otherwise not have received.

### **SACRAMENTO COUNTY — CVSO KEEPS VETERAN WITH PARKINSON'S IN HOME DURING PANDEMIC**

A Vietnam veteran had suffered from Parkinson's disease since 2005 and had no idea he was entitled to benefits. In March of 2020 at the start of the pandemic, he visited the VA's Regional office. It was his first time ever applying for VA benefits and after seven months he still had not heard back from the VA. In September, he reached out to the Sacramento County CVSO for help. The Veterans Service Representative (VSR) first worked to see who had power of attorney, then called the VA to check the status of the claim. The VSR was told no claim was ever submitted, whereupon she filed a claim which also included a request to establish Aid and Attendance benefits for the veteran, since his health was declining rapidly. Shortly after, his wife passed away, which was devastating not just emotionally but financially, since she had been the sole provider. The veteran's stepchildren indicated that they could not cover his living expenses and did not know what to do. The VSR stayed on top of the case and made sure that they processed the veteran's retroactive payment appropriately. The veteran received a retroactive lump sum payment of \$35,000 and ongoing monthly payments of \$3,915. He is now able to remain in his home and pay for his in-home care.

### **LOS ANGELES COUNTY — VETERAN RECEIVES LEGAL ASSISTANCE, AND MORE**

A decorated Army veteran with five years of service, including deployment to Iraq, was honorably discharged in 2012 and upon his return to civilian life received numerous traffic tickets. He soon found himself unable to pay them due to unemployment, homelessness, disability and his reliance on fixed disability benefits as his sole source of income. The veteran visited the Los Angeles Patriotic Hall, which provides a one-stop resource for veterans seeking help. Patriotic Hall is the headquarters of the Los Angeles CVSO and also houses a representative from the Los Angeles County Bar Association (LACBA).

Since the veteran's issues were legal and benefit related, this collocation of expertise resolved the veteran's difficulties, which stemmed from his inability to pay traffic tickets. He had had little hope that he would ever overcome his circumstances and by the time he sought help, he owed thousands of dollars in fines and his license had been suspended. The lack of a license presented a barrier to securing employment and prevented him from seeing his daughter, who lived nearly 600 miles away. An LACBA Veterans Project volunteer advised him of the steps he could take to clear his record and aided him in the preparation of paperwork for the court. His paperwork was filed with the court, resulting in the dismissal of all cases. He has since reinstated his license and obtained employment. Most importantly, the resolution of his traffic tickets and restoration of his driving privileges allowed him the opportunity to reunite with his daughter.

### **SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY — IDENTIFYING ALTERNATE FUNDING TO SUPPORT JUSTICE-INVOLVED AND HOMELESS VETERANS**

Like most counties in California, San Luis Obispo County is dealing with an influx of both justice-involved and homeless veterans, including those involved with the Veteran Treatment Court and Military Diversion Court programs. However, like most county veteran services offices, funding a dedicated representative to support these veterans was not possible. Fortunately, the County Veteran Services Officer (CVSO) was able to leverage AB 109 realignment funding through the county's Community Corrections Partnership (CCP) Board to hire Michael Schacherer to support the veterans in these two categories. Michael is an Army veteran with a combat deployment to Afghanistan and the San Luis Obispo CVSO is very excited to have Michael onboard.



## KERN COUNTY — OPERATION HEADSTONE: HONORING UNMARKED GRAVES OF VETERANS

In January 2020, the Kern County Veterans Service Department (VSD) was contacted by members of Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 97 about a plan to obtain headstones for the unmarked graves of veterans buried in Kern County. The program, dubbed Operation Headstone, was temporarily sidelined as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, but was revitalized in June.

In partnership with Greenlawn Funeral Home, who identified the unmarked graves at its two Bakersfield locations and agreed to waive the placement cost of any headstones obtained, the VSD began collecting the documentation needed to request the headstones. Working with the Kern County Public Health Department and the Recorder's office, along with the National Personnel Records Center, the VSD began ordering headstones from the VA in August. Starting with a list of 45 names, the VSD was able to confirm honorable service and request VA headstones for 27 veterans. The initial 18 headstones were unveiled at a ceremony on Veterans Day at the Greenlawn Southwest location.

With the success of the pilot program, the VSD, Greenlawn, and VFW Post 97 are excited to continue this program until the graves of all eligible veterans buried in Kern County are properly recognized for their service to our nation.



Photo courtesy of the *Bakersfield Californian*, photo taken by Steven Mayer



Photo courtesy of Mark Duffie



Photo courtesy of the *Bakersfield Californian*, photo taken by Steven Mayer

VFW Post 97 Cmdr. Wayne Wright, VFW board member Bill Potter and Greenlawn President/CEO Jim La Mar visit veterans' graves.



## AROUND THE CAPITOL



**Above:** CVSOs attend briefing sponsored by PhRMA during February Training Conference in Sacramento. Presenters at head table: Bre Cameron, Veteran Employment Program Manager, Amgen; Nick Weathers, Western Regional Manager, Helmets to Hardhats; Karmin Noar, Executive Director, Biocom Institute.



**Left:** Senator Bob Archuleta (D-Pico Rivera), Chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, briefs CVSOs at their 2020 Day at the Capitol event.



**Right:** Past CACVSO President Scott Holwell, Kings County CVSO (left), presents 2019 Legislator of the Year award to Senator Jerry Hill (D-San Mateo).

**Left:** Ted Puntillo (Solano County CVSO), past CACVSO President, Chair of the Legislative Committee, former Deputy Secretary of the California Department of Veterans Affairs, and past Yolo County CVSO, receives special Members Resolution from Senator Bob Archuleta (D-Pico Rivera) for his years of service to California veterans.





## LEGISLATOR OF THE YEAR AWARDS

The California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO) has selected Assemblyman Jim Frazier (D-Discovery Bay) as the recipient of the Motomu Nakasako<sup>1</sup> Legislator of the Year award for 2020. This is Assemblyman Frazier's second Legislator of the Year award from the CACVSO.



### **ASSEMBLYMAN JIM FRAZIER (D-DISCOVERY BAY)**

Assemblyman Frazier was elected to the State Assembly in 2012 to represent the 11th Assembly District, which includes portions of Contra Costa, Sacramento, and Solano counties. Prior to the Assembly, he served on the Oakley City Council and as Mayor. He has been a member of the Committee on Veterans Affairs since he was elected.

In 2019, as Chair of the Committee on Transportation, he undertook a two-year process to authorize the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to accept, for the purpose of issuing of a disabled veterans license plate, certification from a County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO) that a veteran is disabled. Prior to AB 408, California used a unique letter issued by the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to substantiate a veteran's disability. This worked when all the state's certifications were handled by the VA regional offices in California. However, the VA began outsourcing these requests to other regional offices outside California, which were not aware of California's disabled veterans license plate requirements and therefore denied the veterans' requests. AB 408 allows CVSOs to give veterans a letter for DMV to receive a disabled veterans plate.

Frazier also earned the CACVSO Legislator of the Year award in 2015 for his multi-year effort to create a "VETERAN" designation on the California driver's license, a longtime goal of the veteran community. AB 935 required the DMV to print the word "VETERAN" on the face of a driver's license or identification card issued to a person who makes that request. The veteran designation allows veterans to be recognized for their service, shows eligibility for public and private programs, and also enables CVSOs to screen veterans for eligibility for federal veterans benefits they were unaware they were eligible for.



<sup>1</sup>The Motomu Nakasako Award is named after the late "Mote" Nakasako, a Los Angeles County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO) who was deeply involved in legislation to improve the lives of veterans. He was a decorated member of the Army's 442nd Regimental Combat Team, one of World War II's most decorated units.

### **Past Recipients of the CACVSO Motomu Nakasako Award for Legislator of the Year**

- 2019 — Senator Jerry Hill
- 2018 — Senator Hannah Beth Jackson and Assemblyman Marc Levine
- 2017 — Senator Josh Newman and Assemblyman Rocky Chávez
- 2016 — Senator Jim Nielsen and Assemblywoman Jacqui Irwin
- 2015 — Senator Richard Roth and Assemblyman Jim Frazier
- 2014 — Senator Ben Hueso and Assemblywoman Sharon Quirk-Silva

### **Recipients of CACVSO Lifetime Achievement Award**

- 2015 — Assemblywoman Toni Atkins
- 2011 — Assemblyman Paul Cook
- 2009 — Congressman Mike Thompson



## CACVSO LEGISLATIVE TEAM

Since the 1950s, the CACVSO has been active at the State Capitol, advocating on behalf of California veterans, military members, and their families. Since 2018, Reeb Government Relations (RGR) has represented the CACVSO at the Capitol. Prior to that, Colonel Art Krause (USAF, ret.) represented CACVSO through 2000 and Pete Conaty LTC (US Army, ret.) & Associates from 2001 through 2017. The transition to RGR provided the Association with years of institutional knowledge and familiarization with the needs of veterans.



### **Bob Reeb, Reeb Government Relations**

Reeb Government Relations was established in January 2005 by Bob Reeb to assist clients with policy analysis, issues management and California legislative and regulatory advocacy in the field of water resources. Bob possesses over three decades of experience in California state and local government and previously served as a legislative staff member and Committee Consultant. He also served as the State Legislative Director for the Association of California Water Agencies.



### **Seth Reeb**

Seth enlisted in the US Army in 2004 as an infantryman with the 10th Mountain Division in Fort Polk, Louisiana. He served in Afghanistan in 2006 and Iraq in 2007-2008. He was promoted to Sergeant in 2009 prior to leaving the Army. Seth was mentored by Pete Conaty in 2017, becoming familiar with veterans service organizations and CACVSO members. Seth assumed the lead role representing CACVSO in 2018.



### **Dana Nichol**

Dana Nichol transferred to Reeb Government Relations in 2018 to continue assisting veterans and military issues. Dana joined Pete Conaty and Associates in 2004 and has worked on all aspects of legislative and budget issues pertaining to the CVSOs and veterans service organizations. He is the resident “long-term memory” on all veterans issues.



### **Pete Conaty, Annual Report Editor/Technical Advisor**

After a 21-year military career and 10 years working for the State Legislature, Pete established the advocacy firm of Pete Conaty & Associates in 1996. Over the last 32 years, he has worked on over 1,300 veteran and military legislative bills at the State Capitol. In 2010 and again in 2015, he was awarded the CalVet Secretary’s Award for his “invaluable contributions to California veterans.” He retired from active lobbying at the end of 2017, however remains a valued advisor to RGR on veteran issues as well as an advisor to numerous veteran service organizations.





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## LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unique challenges for veterans and California Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs). Most CVSO offices are working remotely and cannot conduct face-to-face appointments with veterans and their family members. Most veterans have put their claim filing on hold due to the stay-at-home orders and as a result, claim filing is down 33% since March 2020. This pent-up demand, along with the economic impact of the stay-at-home orders on veterans, will result in a tidal wave of claim filing when the pandemic resolves. All CVSO offices will need to obtain more Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs) in order to effectively manage and process the impending rush of veterans seeking benefits in 2021-22.

### TOP PRIORITY: ADDITIONAL LOCAL ASSISTANCE FUNDING FOR CVSOs

In 2021, the California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO) will be seeking to raise the state's Local Assistance to counties for CVSO offices from the current \$5.6 million funding level to \$11 million. This brings the state in line to pay half of the funding needed to operate these offices throughout the state, as per SB 419 of 2009; currently, counties pick up the majority of the funding. As part of this legislative effort, the CACVSO will continue to educate the Governor's Office, Legislature, and public on the importance and value of CVSOs, who have not had a funding increase since 2013. The funding shortfall resulting from the pandemic and its aftermath will put veterans at risk financially and medically, and is influenced by the following factors:

- The claims process was reduced by 33% in 2020 due to the pandemic.
- The federal VA now recognizes new presumptive conditions for Agent Orange exposure for Vietnam veterans due to Congressional action which greatly expanded the cohort of servicemembers eligible for benefits by including many "Blue Water" sailors who were also exposed to Agent Orange.
- The VA has expanded caregiver assistance for veterans who served prior to 1975 and made changes to Dependency and Indemnity Compensation Program (DIC) benefits that increase payments to widows of veterans who died of a service-connected condition.

The interruption in service from the pandemic, combined with new/expanded benefits, will create a massive increase in claims during and after the pandemic.

### LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

- **Homelessness**

In early 2020, the CACVSO realigned its priorities to focus on getting homeless veterans off the street and into housing, including transitional and permanent supportive housing. The key to assisting homeless veterans is outreach and building trust among a population which usually eschews contact with social workers, including CVSOs. The pandemic severely, if not completely, curtailed CVSOs' abilities to engage with the homeless. Once the spread of the virus is brought under control, CVSOs hope to resume working with CalVet to record and track all homeless contact, outreach activities, and successful entry into a housing environment.

- **Accreditation**

Support legislation that would require an individual who is assisting a veteran with filing a claim for benefits to notify that veteran if they are not a VA-accredited representative, and make it a criminal offense to intentionally misdirect or mislead a veteran, or anyone acting on a veteran's behalf, concerning benefits or entitlements for their own monetary gain.

- **Veterans license plate fee waiver**

Support legislation that would grant the license plate fee waiver to all veterans rated at 100 percent disability or through Individual unemployability. Also, change the language on the DMV form to eliminate the requirement that the veteran have a single disability rated at 100%. Also, separate the disabled placard and make it an option for veterans with a mobility impairment.

- **Restore veterans-only license plate**

Support legislation that would restore the veterans-only specialized license plate, making two veteran plates available for sale — “Veteran” and “Honoring Veterans.”

## **OTHER LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES**

- Support the legislative priorities of the state Veterans Service Organizations that are in line with our own legislative priorities.
- Support legislation that would promote state income tax exemption on military retirement pay for military retirees.
- Support legislation that would reform the current system of property tax relief for disabled veterans by raising the current state dollar limitation on property tax relief for disabled veterans.
- Support legislation that would promote the awarding of state grants through CalVet to Veterans Service Organizations and veterans service agencies that provide claims assistance and outreach to California veterans.
- Support legislation that would require that California Disabled Veterans Business Enterprises (DVBES) hire more disabled and non-disabled veterans. Currently, there is no requirement for DVBES to hire veterans.
- Support legislation that would continue to encourage expansion of veterans treatment courts to more counties by providing state funding of veterans treatment courts in California.
- Support legislation that would reduce property tax assessment on Veterans Service Organizations’ posts and chapters.
- Support legislation that would expand laws to prevent dishonest vendors and businesses that prey on or scam veterans and active-duty military personnel by criminalizing their activities.
- Support legislation that would create a Governor’s Memorial Certificate similar to the Presidential Memorial Certificate (PMC). Include information directing survivors to the CVSOs. (PMC is a signed certificate by the President to the family of deceased veterans.)

## **CACVSO FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES**

- Support legislative, regulatory or policy changes that would create a federal/state/local government partnership to reduce the United States Department of Veterans Administration (USDVA) veterans claims backlog and expand outreach services to veterans.
- Support legislation that would authorize USDVA pharmacies to honor prescriptions written by non-USDVA physicians. Currently, the USDVA medical system will only provide prescription medication to eligible veterans if the prescription is written by a USDVA physician.
- Support legislation that would eliminate the Means Test for veterans to qualify for USDVA medical care. These income limitations have excluded some veterans who would otherwise qualify for enrollment from obtaining their primary healthcare through the USDVA.



## LEGISLATORS WHO SERVED IN THE U.S. MILITARY CALIFORNIA STATE LEGISLATURE 2021-2022

### **Senator Bob Archuleta • US Army Veteran**

Senator Archuleta was elected in 2018 to the California State Senate. He is an Army veteran and was a combat paratrooper with the 82nd Airborne Division. Archuleta is the current Chair of the Senate Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs.

### **Senator Susan Talamantes Eggman • US Army Veteran**

Senator Eggman served four years as a medic in the US Army. She attended California State University, Stanislaus, where she earned a BA in psychology and a master's in social work. Before being elected to the Senate, Eggman served as a State Assemblywoman from 2012-2020.

### **Senator Shannon Grove • US Army Veteran**

Senator Grove served in the US Army and was stationed in Frankfurt, Germany where she witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. She served as an Assemblywoman from 2010-2016 and was the first woman veteran elected to serve in the California Legislature in both the Assembly and Senate.

### **Senator Melissa Melendez • US Navy Veteran**

Senator Melissa Melendez entered the US Navy upon graduating high school. She attended the Defense Language Institute in Monterey and became one of the first women approved by the US Navy to fly aboard a Lockheed EP-3 Orion reconnaissance aircraft overseas, conducting intelligence-gathering operations. Melendez served as a State Assemblywoman from 2012-2020 and was elected to the State Senate in early 2020.

### **Senator Josh Newman • US Army Veteran**

Senator Newman is a US Army veteran. He served as an officer with assignments in a nuclear weapons detachment in South Korea and with an artillery battalion in the 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii. He was elected to the State Senate in 2016.

### **Senator Richard Roth • US Air Force Veteran**

Senator Roth (Major General) served with the Strategic Air Command and Pacific Air Forces units in Arizona; Okinawa, Japan; and California. He transferred from active duty to the Air Force Reserves in 1979 and served at March AFB over the next 13 years with Strategic Air Command and Military Airlift Command units. Roth retired from the Air Force in 2007 after 32 years of service as a Major General. He was elected to the State Senate in 2012.

### **Senator Thomas Umberg • US Army Veteran**

Senator Umberg is a retired US Army Colonel and former federal criminal prosecutor. He served with the 2nd Infantry Division in South Korea and with NATO forces in Italy, and as a paratrooper with the US Army Special Operations Command. Umberg served three terms in the State Assembly — first elected in 1990, again in 1992 and serving again from 2004-2006. He was elected to the Senate in 2006.

### **Assemblyman Devon Mathis • California National Guard Veteran**

Assemblyman Mathis joined the California National Guard where he served for nearly 10 years, including two tours in Iraq with the 1114th Transportation Company. He was awarded a Purple Heart during his second tour in Iraq, where he sustained major injuries from a roadside bomb in 2008. He was elected to the State Assembly in 2014.

### **Assemblyman Randy Voepel • US Navy Veteran**

Assemblyman Randy Voepel enlisted in the US Navy in 1969 and served until 1978. He served two tours of duty in Vietnam, first from 1969 to 1970 and again in 1972. After the Navy, Voepel worked in the insurance industry for 39 years, and in 2000 became the Mayor of Santee, a position he held for 16 years. He was elected to the State Assembly in 2016.



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# LEGAL, LEGISLATIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE VICTORIES FOR VETERANS

BY KATRINA EAGLE AND JIM RADOGNA, CACVSO EDUCATION CONSULTANTS

I know many people would prefer to forget all about 2020, but there were several important legal, legislative, and administrative victories last year that will continue to benefit veterans and their families in 2021 and beyond.

Last year started off fantastically with the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 (“the BWN Act”) going into effect on January 1. The US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) wasted no time processing Blue Water Navy claims, and by the end of the year had completed more than 41,500 claims resulting in over \$754 million in retroactive benefits to veterans!

**Last year ... the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act ... resulting in over \$754 million in retroactive benefits to veterans!**

The BWN Act will continue to significantly benefit veterans and their families in 2021 as well. In November 2020, the US District Court for the Northern District of California issued an Order that upheld the 1991 Consent Decree in the Nehmer class action, a decades-old lawsuit that alleged that the VA was not complying with a 1984 Agent Orange exposure law. As a result, the VA is now required to re-adjudicate all previously denied claims for Agent Orange-related diseases for all veterans who served in the territorial waters of Vietnam. You might ask why this Order matters if the VA is already re-adjudicating BWN veterans’ claims. It’s important because the BWN Act did not include veterans’ estates as eligible beneficiaries, whereas the 1991 Nehmer Consent Decree does! So, while widows may be eligible for service-connected death benefits pursuant to the BWN Act, the November 2020 Court Order now requires the VA to re-decide deceased veterans’ denied claims and pay the eligible survivor or, if the survivor is also deceased, then pay the retroactive compensation to the veterans’ estates. CVSOs are a crucial part of this review process to ensure the VA does not overlook previously denied claims that qualify for this special Nehmer review.

**The VA is now required to re-adjudicate all previously denied claims for Agent Orange-related diseases for all veterans who served in the territorial waters of Vietnam.**

Speaking of Nehmer, the National Defense Authorization Act of 2021, which passed on January 1, 2021, identified three more medical conditions that are to be added to the VA’s list of diseases presumed to be related to herbicide exposure, including bladder cancer, Parkinsonism, and hypothyroidism. So, if a veteran or claimant previously filed and was denied, then pursuant to the 1991 Nehmer Consent Decree, the VA will have to re-decide the claim and pay service-connected compensation retroactive to the date of the original claim.

Administratively, the Board of Veterans’ Appeals (the highest appellate body of the VA) started offering a virtual platform for veterans’ and claimants’ hearings in August 2020. Veterans now no longer need to travel for a Board hearing, so long as they have internet access or are willing/able to travel to their advocate’s office.

In closing, while 2020 forced many organizations to deal with unprecedented challenges, we applaud the CVSO leadership for transitioning to virtual trainings and conferences, and CVSO offices for finding new ways to serve their veteran communities, while staying safe and practicing social distancing protocols.



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**1** Find your military discharge certificate (DD214). If you need assistance obtaining your military records, then contact your County Veteran Service Officer (CVSO).

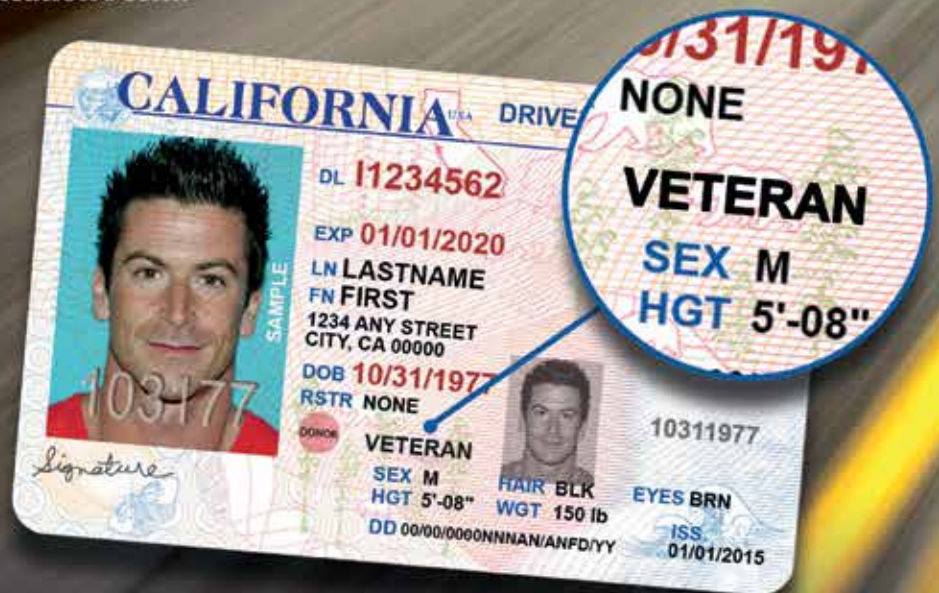
**2** Take your DD214 and government identification to your CVSO to obtain your Veteran Status Verification Form.

**3** Go online or call DMV for an appointment. Then bring your Veteran Status Verification Form to DMV. Complete your application, pay any fees including the \$5 fee to add the Veteran Designation.

*Note: tests may be required.*

For faster CVSO service, schedule an appointment by finding your local CVSO at [www.calvet.ca.gov](http://www.calvet.ca.gov) or calling **(844) 737-8838**.

To schedule an appointment at a DMV, visit [www.dmv.ca.gov](http://www.dmv.ca.gov) or call **(800) 777-0133**.



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## HOW ONE SMALL BILL IS IMPROVING THE LIVES OF THOUSANDS OF VETERANS, THEIR FAMILIES

California was the second to the last state in the nation to allow a veterans' designation on its driver's license. But now veterans across the state visit their county veterans service office every day to apply for this designation, which shows proof of status for a variety of discounts, including 10% off of your bill at local home improvement stores.

Imagine visiting your County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO) to obtain a form for the DMV to get the "Veteran" designation on your driver's license and discovering you are also eligible for a vast array of federal VA services and payments that you earned because of your military service.

It happens every day in CVSO offices as some of the stories in this report will attest.

With the passage of AB 935 in 2014 — authored by Assembly-member Jim Frazier — CalVet, the Department of Motor Vehicles, and the CACVSO worked together to create a form used to verify a veteran's status to the DMV. This eliminated the need for the DMV to check the many different types of identification veterans have.

More importantly, it required the veteran to visit their county veterans service office to obtain the necessary form for the DMV. While this may seem like an extra step, it has provided the opportunity for CVSOs to connect veterans to a myriad of benefits they never even knew they were available to them.

In the process of verifying the veteran's status for the DMV designation, the CVSO also reviews the veteran's military records to see if they are eligible for any federal VA benefits. Because of the complexity of the VA Benefits System and ongoing changes to the law, a vast number of California veterans are unaware that they are eligible for these benefits, some of which include monthly monetary payments.

As a result of AB 935, over 192,000 veterans visited CVSOs to get the "Veteran" designation on their driver's license between November 2015 to December 2020. During these visits, 70,000 veterans filed claims with the federal VA and more than 27,000 veterans are now receiving annualized VA payments totaling \$160,311,920. This does not include over \$91 million in retroactive payments and \$1.3 million in miscellaneous payments.

Since the majority of this benefit is annualized monthly payments made directly to approximately 20,000 California veterans, these monthly payments continue as long as the veteran lives. After the veteran passes, the spouse may be able to continue to receive benefits.

Were it not for the drivers' license program continuing to drive veterans to their CVSOs, they would not discover the untapped financial and health care resources available to them. This program has had a tremendous impact on thousands of California veterans and their families, and will continue to do so for decades to come.

On behalf of all veterans and their families, thank you Assembly-member Jim Frazier for making this program a reality.

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**As a result of AB 935, over 192,000 veterans visited CVSOs to get the "Veteran" designation on their driver's license between November 2015 to December 2020. During these visits, 70,000 veterans filed claims with the federal VA and more than 27,000 veterans are now receiving annualized VA payments totaling \$160,311,920. This does not include over \$91 million in retroactive payments and \$1.3 million in miscellaneous payments.**

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**ABOUT THE CALIFORNIA STATE COMMANDERS VETERANS COUNCIL:**

Founded in 1966, and incorporated in 1981, the California State Commanders Veterans Council promotes the rights, benefits, and opportunities of veterans in the State of California.

The Council conducts advocacy efforts at the state Legislature, the California Department of Veterans Affairs, the CalVet board, the Dept. of General Services, and other state and federal entities as well as businesses concerned with veterans.

As per California Military and Veterans Code Section 73.4; The Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs is directed to confer with the California State Commanders Veterans Council twice yearly on issues affecting California veterans.

2021 CSCVC officers:

- Chair - Frederick A. Romero, American GI Forum of California
- Vice Chair - Jim Anderson, Military Order of the Purple Heart
- Secretary - Chuck Jamison, Scottish American Military Society
- Treasurer - Jim Anderson, Military Order of the Purple Heart
- Legislative Officer - Gerald "JR" Wilson, Disabled American Veterans

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