State of Illinois
Department of Veterans' Affairs

Illinois Veterans Advisory Council

Annual Report 2019

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★ Letter from the Director

The Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs would like to present the Fiscal Year 2019 Illinois Veterans Advisory Council Annual Report. At the beginning of the 2018 Fiscal Year the Discharged Servicemembers Task Force was sunset and the Annual Reporting was tasked to the Illinois Veterans Advisory Council.

To better serve our veterans, key initiatives have been discussed and acted upon throughout the quarterly meetings that were held. The appointed members of the council have dedicated hours and resources to ensure the most relevant and timely issues facing veterans have been explored and addressed.

The Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs, in conjunction with the Illinois Veterans Advisory Council, works diligently to investigate the re-entry process for servicemembers who return to civilian life after being engaged in an active theatre.

Linda Chapa LaVia
Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs

★ History of the Illinois Veterans Advisory Council

Pursuant to Public Act 100-10, effective June 30, 2017, the State of Illinois created the Illinois Veterans Advisory Council (IVAC). The mission of IVAC is to investigate the re-entry process for service members who return to civilian life after being engaged in an active theatre. The investigation shall include the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder, homelessness, disabilities, and other issues the council finds relevant to the re-entry process. To accomplish the mission IVAC has convened teams of experienced, professional veteran advocates, and community leaders to analyze major issue areas and develop strategic policy recommendations. IVAC's strategic policy recommendations are published annually in the IVAC Annual Report. In accordance with the Act, IVAC members include:

- Four members of the General Assembly appointed one each by the President of the Senate, the Minority Leader of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives
- Six veterans appointed by the Director of Veterans' Affairs
- One veteran appointed by the commander or president of each veterans service organization that is chartered by the federal government and by the State of Illinois and elects to appoint a member
- One person appointed by the Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard
- One person appointed by the Illinois Attorney General
- One person appointed by the Illinois Secretary of State
- One person appointed by the Director of the Illinois Department of Employment Security
- One person appointed by each military family organization that is chartered by the federal government

★ Illinois Veterans' Advisory Council

Myron Kirby, Chairman
American Legion
Michael Peck, Vice Chairman
Military Order of the World Wars

GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEMBERS	APPOINTED BY
The Honorable Toi Hutchinson	President of the Senate
The Honorable Sue Rezin	Minority Leader of the Senate
The Honorable Lance Yednock	Speaker of the House
The Honorable Dan Swanson	Minority Leader of the House

EXTERNAL AGENCY APPOINTEES	
Brig. General Richard Neely	Illinois National Guard
Thomas Banning	Office of the Attorney General
Greg Curran	Secretary of State
Jorge Bermudez	IL Department of Employment Security

DIRECTOR'S APPOINTEES	
Bill Wolff	Veteran Advocate
Quinn Triplett	Veteran Advocate
Anthony Ortiz	Veteran Advocate
Ariel Shivers-McGrew	Veteran Advocate
Clayton Young	Veteran Advocate
Megan Everett	Veteran Advocate

VETERAN SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS/AFFILIATES	
Al Reynolds	Disabled American Veterans
Stanley Olenjack	Marine Corps League
Keith Wetherell	AMVETS
Maureen Cattani	Blue Star Mothers of America
Pat Noel	Catholic War Veterans
Dr. Jerry Field	Jewish War Veterans
Joe Schaler	Military Order of the Purple Heart
Louis Myers	ILROA / ILSAR
Steve Fixler	Veteran Assistance Commission
Vince Long	Veterans of Foreign Wars
Roy Dolgos	Vietnam Veteran's of America
Robert Tyler	Military Officers Association of America
Crystal Womack	Illinois Veterans' Advisory Council, Secretary

★ Recommended Fiscal Year 2019 Legislative Support to the Illinois Congressional Delegation

VA Mental Health and Suicide Prevention – Ensure that VA remains fully funded and does not outsource their mental health services for PTSD. The VA must remain peer friendly.

Burn Pit Exposure – Currently, DVA does not provide presumption of service connection for diseases related to burn pit exposure.

Comprehensive Caregiver Support – in recognition of the significant role that family caregivers play in providing personal care services and supports to veterans severely injured in the line of duty after September 11, 2001.

Expand and Strengthen Service member transition – 250,000 service members leave service every year and need transition assistance.

Improve Survivor Benefit –DIC is significantly lower than an equivalent provided to federal civilian employees who are killed while serving in the line of duty.

Transition Improvement Act 2019 – Passed by House on May 22, 2019. Bill would reopen TAP (Transition Assistance Program) in the community programs for veterans.

Dental Care for Military Veterans – urge that legislation be enacted to provide dental care to all enrolled service-connected disabled veterans.

Elimination of Widow Tax – support HR 553, Military Surviving Spouses Equity Act and S 622 Military Widow's Tax Elimination Act of 2019.

★ Recommended Fiscal Year 2019 Legislative for Illinois General Assembly

Senate Bill 110 – Amendment to the Standard Homestead Exemption for Disabled Veterans. This bill will allow Surviving Spouses to receive the exemption when qualified for DIC.

Senate Bill 1255 – Will allow veterans to transfer state education benefits to their children.

Senate Bill 1660 –Skillbridge –Provides that all state agencies shall consider filling job vacancies with transitioning active service members.

High Risk Missing Persons

Act No. 631
Signed 7/27/2018

Topics: Health, Mental Health and Reintegration Issues

Amends the Missing Persons Identification Act, provides that the definition of high risk missing person includes a person who is a Veteran or active duty member of the United States Armed Forces, the National Guard, or any reserve component thereof, who is believed to have a physical or mental health condition that is related to his or her service.

Veterans' Affairs Act

Act No. 632
Signed 7/27/2018

Topics: Health

Amends the Department of Veterans' Affairs Act, provides notification requirements for a state Veterans Home relating to more than one person residing within the Veterans Home being diagnosed with an infectious disease within a certain time period, requires the Department to post such notification on its website.

Veterans Preference Act

Act No. 826
Signed 8/13/2018

Topics: Employment and Occupational Licensing

Preferences shall be given to persons who have been members of the armed forces of the United States or who, while citizens of the United States, were members of the armed forces of allies of the United States in time of hostilities with a foreign country in the employment and appointment to fill positions in the construction, addition to, or alteration of all public works undertaken or contracted for by the State.

Service Member Residential Property Act

Act No. 616
Signed 7/20/2018

Topics: Active Duty Discounts and Benefits, Insurance and Death Benefits

Amends the Service Member Residential Property Act, provides that if a service member who has entered into certain residential leases is killed in action or while on active duty, then the immediate family or dependents of the service member may terminate the lease.

Psychiatric Training Recognition

Act No. 908
Signed 8/17/2018

Topics: Employment and Occupational Licensing

Amends the Public Aid Code, requires the Department of Healthcare and Family Services to seek federal approval to allow a person who has completed a psychiatric training certification program from any branch of the United States Armed Forces and who has at least one year of experience in the mental health setting to be recognized as a mental health professional.

Military Patients

Adopted
Date 2/21/2019

Topics: Health, Mental Health and Reintegration Issues

Urges healthcare providers to verify a patient or residents military status and to provide training to staff on the best practices for providing healthcare to veterans.

Agent Orange Exposure for Veteran Treatment

Adopted
Date 3/13/2019

Topics: Health

Urges Congress to pass legislation in support of the expansion of the presumptions for Agent Orange exposure for veteran treatment purposes.

Veterans Mental Health

Adopted
Date 4/2/2019

Topics: Mental Health and Reintegration Issues

States support for veterans currently struggling with mental illness and thoughts of suicide, encourages the state to create a memorial for veterans who have died of suicide to be included at Oak Ridge Cemetery.

★ Transition Programs

The period of moving from active duty to civilian life can be challenging. Over 250,000 service members leave the military every year. To assist veterans with reintegration into their communities it is important for them to have access to transition resources that apply to their local communities. We urge that the TAP (Transition Assistance Program) in cooperation with Department of Labor and Small Business Administration be reopened in the community programs for veterans.

We urge the Illinois National Guard Leadership to add TAP for the returning National Guard Members upon their release from active duty. The TAP

★ Women Veterans

Today, women are serving in greater numbers in the U.S. military and make up to 20 per cent of new recruits. 15.9 percent of the 1.3 million personnel serving on active duty and 19.3 percent of the National Guard and reserve forces.

A recent survey has reported that VA employees continue to confuse women veterans as spouses and caregivers or challenge their veteran status. This is unacceptable and all those who serve veterans must be trained to treat them with respect.

Women veterans with children who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless face very difficult barriers from single veterans without children. It is recommended that housing agencies receiving grants be required to set aside funding for women veterans with children.

★ PTSD and Suicide

We urge the VA not to outsource the solution to PTSD care. The VA must replicate the peer, community and institutional support veterans had while they were in the military. The VA can provide veterans with a feeling of connection to other people, give veterans a reason for living or a sense of purpose.

We urge that all veteran service officers and their staff be trained in suicide prevention. Clinical trial research has shown the training to be highly effective in eliminating suicidal ideation.

★ Incarcerated Veterans

Veterans can sometimes run into issues with law enforcement and the criminal justice system resulting in incarceration. Despite circumstances, many veterans may be eligible for VA Benefits, the amount depends on the type of benefit and reason for incarceration.

VA disability compensation payments are reduced if a veteran is convicted of a felony and imprisoned for more than 60 days. Once released from prison, compensation may be reinstated based upon the severity of the service-connected disability.

The Health Care for Re-entry program is designed to help the incarcerated veteran successfully reintegrate back into the community upon released. The Advisory Council strongly urges the IDVA to assign a VSO to each state correctional facility to assist veterans with reinstatement of benefits and re-entry into the community.

★ Conclusion

The Illinois Veterans Advisory Council (IVAC) presents this Fiscal Year 2019 Annual Report pursuant to Public Act 100-10, effective June 30, 2017. The IVAC council is committed to assisting our veterans with the re-entry process into civilian life. We will continue to focus on issues our veterans face every day.

Recommendations regarding PTSD, homelessness, disabilities, and any other issues that are relevant will be administered and presented by IVAC.

The Illinois Veterans Advisory Council (IVAC) was established July 1, 2004. IVAC meets quarterly as required and is available to meet at the call of the Chair or at the call of IDVA or the Governor. The Council is empowered to:

- Advise IDVA with respect to the fulfillment of its statutory duties.
- Review and study the issues and concerns that are most significant to Illinois veterans and advise the Department on those issues and concerns.
- Receive a report from IDVA or the Director's designee at each meeting with respect to the general activities of the Department.
- Report to the Governor and the General Assembly annually describing the issues addressed and the actions taken by the council during the year as well as any recommendations for future action.

The Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs will also remain a key source for providing administrative support to IVAC and will be able to assist with taking on the duties of studying the issues that impact our veterans and compiling and presenting an annual report of the findings by IVAC to the Governor and the Illinois General Assembly.

For more information about the Department's programs and services, please contact:

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