



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA JOINT LEADERSHIP COUNCIL OF VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

900 EAST MAIN STREET
RICHMOND, VA 23219

Air Force Association
American Legion
AMVETS
Association of the United States Army
Disabled American Veterans
Fleet Reserve Association
Korean War Veterans Association
Legion of Valor of the U.S., Inc.
Marine Corps League
Military Order of the Purple Heart
Military Officers Association of America
Military Order of the World Wars
National Association for Uniformed Services
Navy Seabee Veterans of America
Non-Commissioned Officers Association
Paralyzed Veterans of America
Reserve Officers Association
Roanoke Valley Veterans Council
Veterans of Foreign Wars
Vietnam Veterans of America
Virginia Army/Air National Guard Enlisted Association
Virginia National Guard Association
Women Marines Association

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Position Paper 2015-01 DVS Veterans Service Representatives and Benefits Offices

1. **OBJECTIVE:** Provide funds to hire, train, and retain Department of Veterans Services (DVS) veterans service representatives, add personnel at understaffed DVS Benefits Offices, and build needed service capacity in order to ensure the timely development and submission of accurate veterans' claims to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).
2. **BACKGROUND:**
 - a. Veterans are entitled to disability compensation from the federal government for injuries or illnesses resulting from military service. In FFY2013, Virginia veterans received \$2.3 billion in VA disability compensation and pension payments.
 - b. To obtain this compensation, veterans must file claims with the VA, which can be a long, complex process. Most veterans seek assistance to file a claim. To assist Virginia veterans, DVS operates 23 Benefits Offices that provide free assistance to Virginia veterans and family members in developing and filing VA claims.
 - c. Virginia receives a considerable return on investment for helping Virginia veterans. In FY2014, DVS filed 23,241 claims on behalf of Virginia veterans, resulting in an estimated \$239 million in new disability compensation payments directly to veterans. The award of a VA disability rating also results in priority access to VA medical care.
 - d. DVS Veterans Service Representatives provide direct one-on-one assistance to veterans in developing and filing their claims.
 - e. Knowledgeable, trained, and experienced Veterans Service Representatives are in high demand and many leave for higher paying jobs that DVS cannot match.
 - f. DVS has had a 70 percent turnover among Representatives during the past five years. The combination of turnover, personnel shortfalls in high-demand areas (Norfolk, Richmond, and Roanoke), and the lack of depth at DVS offices (most have only one Representative) has resulted in reduced services to Virginia veterans and families, and missed opportunity to serve many more veterans.
 - g. DVS lacks the financial resources to recruit, hire, and retain experienced and trained Veterans Service Representatives by being able to offer them competitive salaries based on their operational base. DVS also lacks the resources to add Representatives in understaffed locations and to build needed service capacity.
3. **DISCUSSION:** The solution is to provide sufficient funding so that DVS can offer competitive salaries based on each representative's operational base and qualifications in order to recruit, hire and retain experienced and trained representatives, invest in training, expand the number of Veterans Service Representatives at understaffed locations, and build needed service capacity.
4. **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Governor and General Assembly support the hiring, training, and retention of DVS Veterans Service Representatives, the addition of representatives in understaffed locations, and the building of needed service capacity at Benefits Offices, by approving an additional \$1,750,000 (GF) in FY2016.