

MEMBERS

JIM NIELSEN  
CHAIRMAN  
BEN HUESO  
VICE-CHAIR

BEN ALLEN  
JANET NGUYEN  
RICHARD ROTH

California Legislature  
Senate Committee  
on  
Veterans Affairs

STAFF DIRECTOR  
WADE COOPER TEASDALE

COMMITTEE ASSISTANT  
CINDY BALDWIN

STATE CAPITOL  
SACRAMENTO, CA 95814-4900  
(916) 651-1503

JIM NIELSEN  
CHAIRMAN

May 29, 2015

The Honorable Mark Leno  
Chair, Senate Budget Committee,  
State Capitol, Room 4203  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Shirley N. Weber  
Chair, Assembly Budget Committee,  
State Capitol, Room 6026  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Chairpersons Leno and Weber:

We, the members of the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, are joined by the other undersigned senators, in urging the Budget Conference Committee to adopt the proposal to augment the State General Fund allocation for county veterans service officers (CVSO) by three million dollars. This act will replicate the augmentations to the 2013-14 and 2014-15 State Budgets, thereby maintaining total state funding to CVSOs at the \$5.6 million level.

Since 1995, California's CVSOs have obtained more than \$4.61 billion in federal benefits for our state's military veterans and dependents. These payments continue annually for the lifetime of the veteran or other qualified, veteran-related recipient. In addition, the associated federal health care benefits allow significant program costs to be diverted away from programs funded by state taxpayers.

The three million dollar augmentations in the last two Budgets have significantly benefited California veterans and California as a whole. From FY 12-13 to FY 13-14, the amount of federal veterans benefits obtained in those years for California's veterans by CVSOs, increased dramatically from \$418 million to \$546 million.

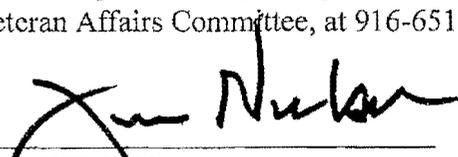
Seventy-four percent of CVSO offices were authorized by their Boards of Supervisors to add staffing as a result of receiving the past augmentation funding; totaling 32.5 full-time equivalent veterans service representatives and 30 support staff. Those hires were in direct response to several reports found that the most effective way to increase California's utilization of veteran benefits. These staff positions will be eliminated if funding is not continued.

The previous augmentations allowed CVSOs to offer new services, such as county veteran ID cards, which increased veteran traffic through CVSO offices by approximately 25 percent. That increased traffic resulted in the initiation of many new claims for benefits. An even more dramatic increase in traffic will occur this November 11, when Assembly Bill 935 (Frazier, 2014) goes into effect. AB 935 authorizes the "VETERAN" designation on the driver's licenses of California veterans. Veterans will face long waiting times for services if the augmentation funds are discontinued.

CVSOs have increased their outreach efforts into the general population and also into specialized demographic cohorts within the larger veterans community. These outreach efforts cannot be sustained if funding is not ongoing.

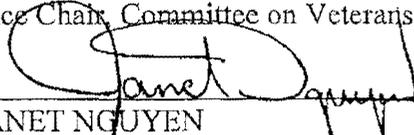
The bottom-line measure of success is the number of federal dollars drawn down for disability claims; because California now has standardized software for tracking CVSO workload, we can determine that the current upward spike in awards is the direct result of CVSO efforts.

We look forward to working with you to approve this as part of the Budget. If you have any technical questions regarding CVSOs, please do not hesitate to contact Wade Teasdale with the Veteran Affairs Committee, at 916-651-1503.

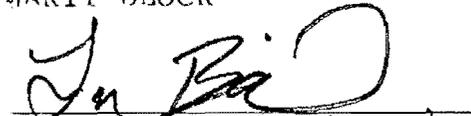
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
JIM NIELSEN  
Senator, 4<sup>th</sup> District  
Chair, Committee on Veterans Affairs

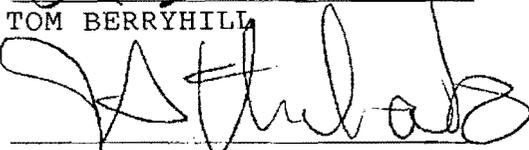
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
BEN ALLEN  
Senator, 26<sup>th</sup> District  
Member, Committee on Veterans Affairs

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
BEN HUESO  
Senator, 40<sup>th</sup> District  
Vice Chair, Committee on Veterans Affairs

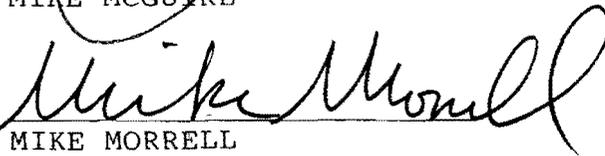
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
JANET NGUYEN  
Senator, 34<sup>th</sup> District  
Member, Committee on Veterans Affairs

  
MARTY BLOCK

  
TOM BERRYHILL

  
ANDY VIDAK

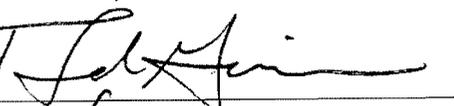
  
MIKE MCGUIRE

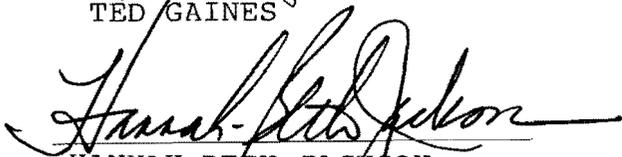
  
MIKE MORRELL

  
JOEL ANDERSON

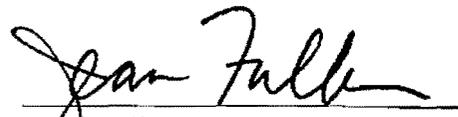
  
ISADORE HALL

  
JEFF STONE

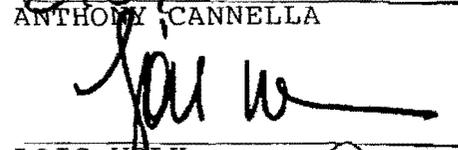
  
TED GAINES

  
HANNAH-BEPH JACKSON

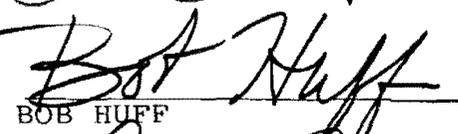
  
CONNIE LEYVA

  
JEAN FULLER

  
ANTHONY CANNELLA

  
LOIS WOLK

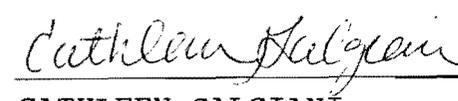
  
TONY MENDOZA

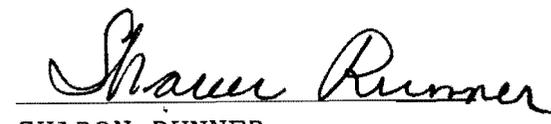
  
BOB HUFF

  
PATRICIA BATES

  
STEVEN GLAZER

  
RICHARD PAN

  
CATHLEEN GALGIANI

  
SHARON RUNNER