

CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unique challenges for veterans and 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 with paying half of the funding needed to operate CVSOs throughout the state as per SB 419 of 2009. Currently, the counties pick up the majority of the funding. As part of this legislative effort, the CACVSO will continue to educate the Governor's Office, the Legislature, and the public on the importance and value of County Veterans Service Officers. CVSOs have not had a funding increase since 2013. The pandemic and its aftermath will put veterans at risk financially and medically because of this funding shortfall which will be 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 care-giver 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 their 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 amongst a population which usually eschews contact with social workers such as CVSOs. The pandemic severely, if not completely, curtailed CVSOs abilities to engage with the homeless. Once the spread of the virus has been 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 has to 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, so that there would be two 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, 2021

- Support legislative, regulatory or policy changes that would create a federal/state/ local government partnership to reduce the 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.