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## CACVSO PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE FOR 2022

The California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO) endured continued challenges this year due to the ongoing COVID pandemic. The pandemic's surges led to delays in fully reopening offices, limited in-person continuing education, and restricted conducting outreach at large events or at long-term care facilities. However, our association continues to meet the pandemic's challenges and we haven't wavered from our commitment to deliver critical advocacy to veterans and their families.

During FY 20/21, CVSOs statewide served 69,038 veterans and family members in person and 671,132 via phone calls and emails. This resulted in the filing of 81,834 claims for VA benefits on behalf of those veterans and their families. CVSOs continue to be one of the few county agencies that generate revenue for their general funds, and during this year \$401,787,708 in new 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.

Many thanks to Governor Gavin Newsom and the legislature for increasing Local Assistance funding from the state budget to the counties for CVSO offices. This is a huge way for California to show our nation's veterans how serious we are about ensuring that VA benefits are delivered quickly to those who have earned them. I can assure the Governor that this funding will go directly to member counties' efforts to meet the ever-increasing demand for services.

Also, many thanks to the California Legislature for their efforts in updating California's laws to better meet the needs of our veterans. More specifically, the implementation of the Disabled Veteran License Plate CVSO verification has expedited the process of obtaining a Disabled Veteran license plate and vehicle registration. This ensures that disabled veterans have greater transportation access and a reduced financial burden. As a result of this streamlined process, some offices are seeing a thirty-percent increase in utilization of this benefit.

As always, none of this would have been possible if it were not for our strong partnership and collaborative efforts with CalVet. Specifically, our relationships with Secretary Vito Imbasciani MD, Undersecretary Russell Atterberry, Deputy Secretaries Lindsey Sin, Keith Boylan, Xochitl Rodriguez Murillo, Virginia Wimmer, and John Spangler continue to strengthen and benefit California's veterans. Our association is growing and improving, but we cannot accomplish our goals without these important connections with our allies at CalVet.

As an association, we will continue to fill our ranks with high-caliber veterans' service professionals, who all share in the sacred duty of serving California's 1.66 million veterans. It has been an honor to serve as your president these past two years. I congratulate Rhonda Murphy on her historic election as the first woman President in our association's history. I am excited to see her in this role!

**Nathan Johnson**, President (February 2020 – February 2022)  
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 taking on the role of Secretary of the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) a little more than six years ago, many aspects of the California veteran experience and service-provider community have changed. We have witnessed the hard-fought expansion of VA benefits for millions of veterans nationwide, the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic and the end of the war in Afghanistan in 2021. All of this means that more veterans than ever are seeking access to the vital benefits and services they need and deserve.

Despite the ever-changing landscape of the veteran community, the successful partnership between CalVet and California's County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) remains strong.

Over this past year, CVSOs continued to play a critical role in serving our large and diverse veteran population. CalVet and the CVSOs worked hand-in-hand to help veterans and their families navigate benefits and maintain access to vital services, both virtually and in person. Along with CalVet's three District Offices, the CVSOs provided secure remote digital signature capability for claims documents so that veterans could file claims from the safety of their homes. Likewise, CalVet and the CVSOs delivered critical benefits and mental health outreach via webinar and in person, reaching over 6,700 service members, veterans, and their families. CVSOs remain an integral part of mental health programs funded through CalVet's \$2.4 million Proposition 63 Grant Program, which is needed now more than ever.

In 2021, CVSOs brought in nearly \$402 million in new federal monetary benefits to California veterans and their families; nearly \$244 million of which represents annualized monthly payments for the rest of their lives. Furthermore, last year, the state increased subvention funding for CVSOs and CalVet expects that this investment will undoubtedly result in more direct outreach and services to California veterans and their families.

CVSOs and CalVet share the important mission to serve the state's 1.6 million veterans and their families. The entire CalVet team and I greatly appreciate the work of our CVSOs and look forward to a successful collaboration in 2022.

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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### ON THE COVER

The combination of the Bravo and Zulu nautical signal flags typically conveyed by flaghoist or voice radio — and featured on the cover of this year's issue — means "Well Done" with regard to actions, operations or performance. California's CVSOs had a great deal to overcome in 2021, and they deserve our thanks for a job well done. **BRAVO ZULU!**



## ABOUT COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS

County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) are county employees whose job it is to assist veterans, servicemembers, and their families within the county to obtain their earned federal veterans' benefits. The services they provide are 100% free to veterans and their families. While CVSOs' main mission is to assist the county's veterans in obtaining their earned benefits from the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), they also connect veterans to other state and county benefits.

In FY 2020-21, California's CVSOs assisted veterans to obtain about \$402 million in VA claims, which are paid directly to the veteran, usually for the rest of their life. VA healthcare is also a key benefit for veterans. VA benefits are unique to each veteran's service and are therefore complex to qualify for, hence the need for the assistance of a trained CVSO and their equally trained Veterans Service Representatives (VSR).

Every county in California is now served by a CVSO, except for Alpine County, which does not have enough veterans to justify a CVSO; plus, the distance to neighboring counties is small. For efficiency, some other smaller counties have reached agreements to share a CVSO. Currently, 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.

The CVSOs are represented by the California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO), which was formed in 1945 — in the wake of WWII and in anticipation of the needs of over 4 million veterans returning home. CACVSO is a professional training and advocacy organization comprised of the CVSO offices throughout the state.

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**The CVSO system is the most widely used model by states to deliver services and assist veterans in obtaining federal and state benefits.**

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The majority of CVSO funding is provided by the counties, while the remainder comes from the state's General Fund and other state programs, as CVSOs help veterans with mental health services and Medi-Cal cost avoidance.

The CVSO system is the most widely used model by states to deliver services and assist veterans in obtaining federal and state benefits.

### History

California's CVSOs track their beginning in the state to 1924, when Stanislaus County began assisting veterans from the Spanish-American War and World War I. San Bernardino County followed in 1926, Riverside in 1930, Ventura in 1931, and San Diego in 1933. On June 6, 1939, Governor Culbert Olson signed AB 1270 into law, which permitted Boards of Supervisors to "appoint, prescribe the qualifications of and fix the compensation of an officer to be termed 'county service officer.'" The bill furthermore stated that "It shall be the duty of the county service officer to administer the aid provided for in this chapter, to investigate all claims, applications or requests for aid made pursuant to the terms of this chapter, and to perform any other such services as may be detailed to him for performance by the board of supervisors."

The end of World War II sparked a new chapter in the mission of the CVSOs. 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). Alcoholism, homelessness, and unemployment also were rampant, leading to a skyrocketing divorce rate." 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. CACVSO endeavored to do a better job of assimilating veterans 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? The Veterans Administration (now called the US Department of Veterans Affairs) was responsible for carrying out the law's key provisions by communicating the benefits available and offering the assistance needed to navigate the process. However, the magnitude of accomplishing this for four million veterans was not a task easily achieved from Washington, DC, so California wisely adopted the CVSO model of veterans benefit assistance. This model has grown to be the most widely used approach to delivering services to veterans, with 24 states and several Tribal Nations using the CVSO model. California's legislature also continued to provide more tools for the CVSOs to use. In 1946, the legislature passed AB 14, giving CVSOs the powers of a notary public.

Since WWII, the scope, duties, responsibilities, and tools of the CVSOs has steadily grown into the professional cadre of trained advocates they are today. For instance, in 2014, AB 935 created the "VETERAN" designation on the driver's license. To qualify as eligible to receive this designation, AB 935 stipulated that the veteran must first visit a CVSO for a determination of veteran status before DMV would process the application. This process directs veterans to the CVSO offices, where they can also be screened for other federal benefits for which they may be eligible. Since AB 935 went into effect, almost 220,000 veterans have visited a CVSO office in pursuit of the driver's license designation and almost 86,000 have filed claims for VA benefits, resulting in \$202 million in annualized VA payments paid directly to the veterans.

The legislature also helps counties defray the costs of maintaining CVSO offices by providing Local Assistance funding from the state budget. Acknowledging the importance of the work CVSOs do, the legislature, with the concurrence of Governor Newsom, approved an increase in this funding in the FY 2021-22 State Budget from \$5.6 million to \$11 million. CVSO offices can now hire and train more VSRs to help assist veterans with their VA claims and go out into the community to perform outreach among the elderly, homeless, urban, and rural hard-to-reach populations who may not be aware of their potential eligibility for federal and state veterans benefits.

### **Going forward**

The CVSOs, through their professional association, the CACVSO, continue to sponsor and support state legislation to enhance their abilities and provide the resources necessary to fulfill their mission of helping veterans obtain the benefits they earned by virtue of their service to this country. The CACVSO also works closely with the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet), which has an oversight and training function over CVSOs as mandated by the legislature. The CACVSO organizes triannual, weeklong training conferences that help CVSOs and their key staff to stay abreast of the constantly evolving federal and state programs and their eligibility processes. ■

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**Over the years since WWII, the scope, duties, responsibilities, and tools of the CVSOs has steadily grown into the professional cadre of trained advocates they are today.**

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# 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*



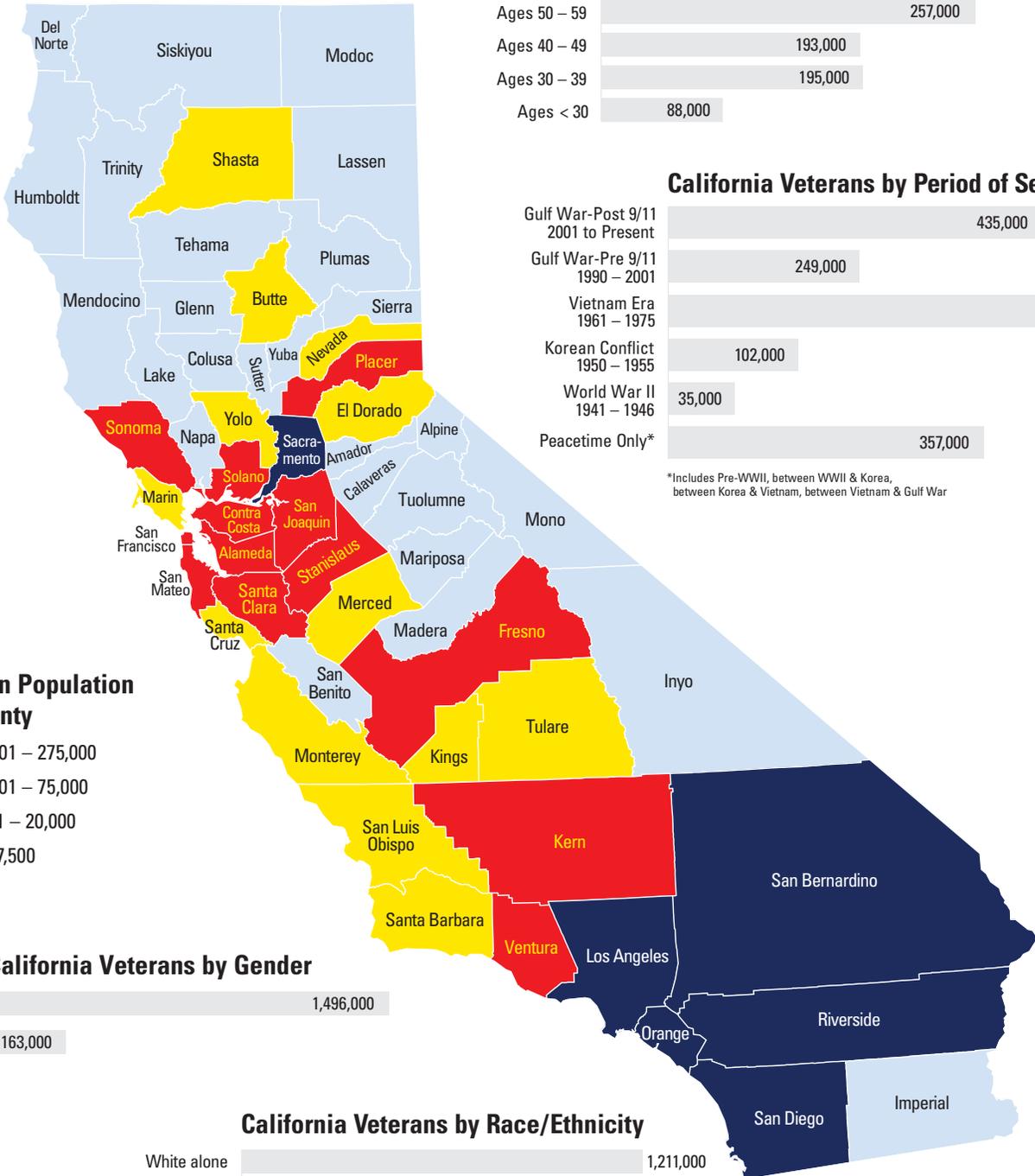
**VETPRO**



# California Veterans by the Numbers

Estimated By County as of September 30, 2020

Source: USDVA VetPro 2018 (Tables 6L, 7L, 8L, 9L)  
[http://www.va.gov/vetdata/veteran\\_population.asp](http://www.va.gov/vetdata/veteran_population.asp)



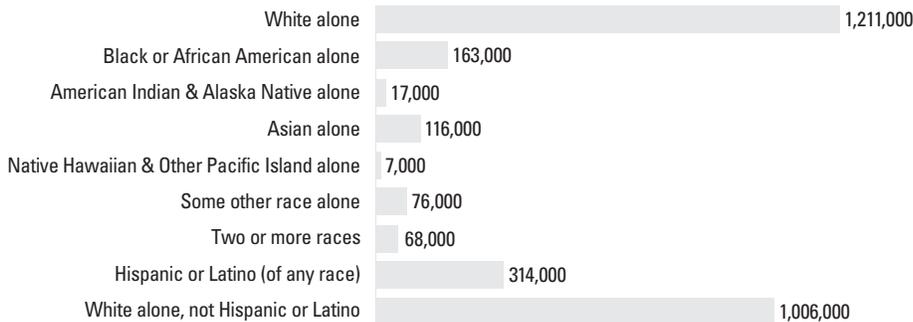
## Veteran Population by County

- 75,001 – 275,000
- 20,001 – 75,000
- 7,501 – 20,000
- 0 – 7,500

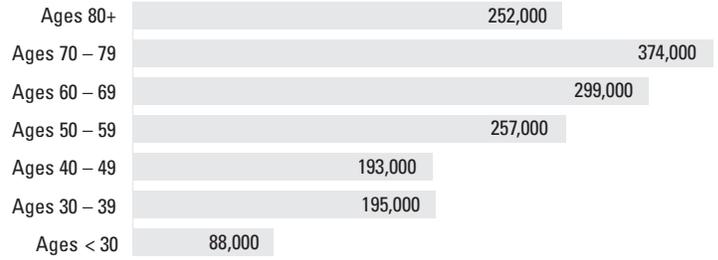
## California Veterans by Gender



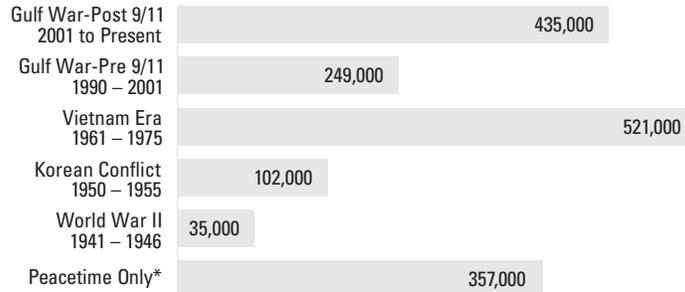
## California Veterans by Race/Ethnicity



## 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 is 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 \$402 million in benefits for the 2020-21 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 a relaxed but professional 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.
- Without the assistance of a CVSO, veterans face difficulties navigating the VA claims process in the best of times. The pandemic's restrictions in 2020 and 2021 amplified the difficulties involved in dealing with a large bureaucracy like the VA. In these difficult times, CVSOs play an even greater role in acting as facilitators and advocates for veterans seeking their benefits. To comply with social distancing rules and health ordinances, yet still help veterans, CVSOs developed alternative methods of assisting veterans. CVSO offices offered consultations face-to-face (when allowed), and otherwise leveraged technology and implemented online appointments, video conferencing, virtual offices, and electronic signature applications.

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**CVSOs play an even greater role in acting as facilitators and advocates for veterans seeking their benefits.**

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## FACTORS AFFECTING HOW MANY VETERANS RECEIVE MONETARY BENEFITS

Studies have shown:

- Claims to the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) filed with the assistance of a professional representative from the office of a County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO), commonly called a Veterans Service Representative (VSR), 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 are missing out on their benefits.**
- The veterans' quality of life — **there are approximately \$1.1 billion in VA benefits lost 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 in the field. California can do that by:

- Maintaining the \$11 million in state support to counties for CVSOs that was approved in the 2021-22 budget by the Governor and the legislature. This new level of funding will allow CVSO offices to increase the number of VSRs and get more boots on the ground to assist veterans and their families, while also allowing small or rural counties the latitude to tailor the use of the 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?

Beginning in 2022, the state will be sending the counties \$11 million in Local Assistance funding from the state budget. This will help counties to hire more Veterans Service Representatives (VSR) and increase outreach to underserved veterans. In 2021, the CVSOs were operating on a \$5.6 million level of Local Assistance and still able to make a tremendous difference in the lives of many veterans. The proof of this is in the VA and CalVet reporting data.

From 2013, when the state funding level was increased to \$5.6 million, to 2021:

- The state's utilization rate had 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 VA Compensation and Pension Benefits (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.



## CVSOs IN ACTION

### Monterey County CVSO office organizes homeless Veterans Stand Down

When the state and county loosened restrictions in June of 2021, the Monterey County CVSO office moved quickly to condense a normally three day event to one day, providing many essential services for veterans in need, including dental. The Stand Down served 117 veterans that day.



### Placer County provides Purple Heart recipient parking and CVSO office receives gift cards for veterans from Elks Lodge



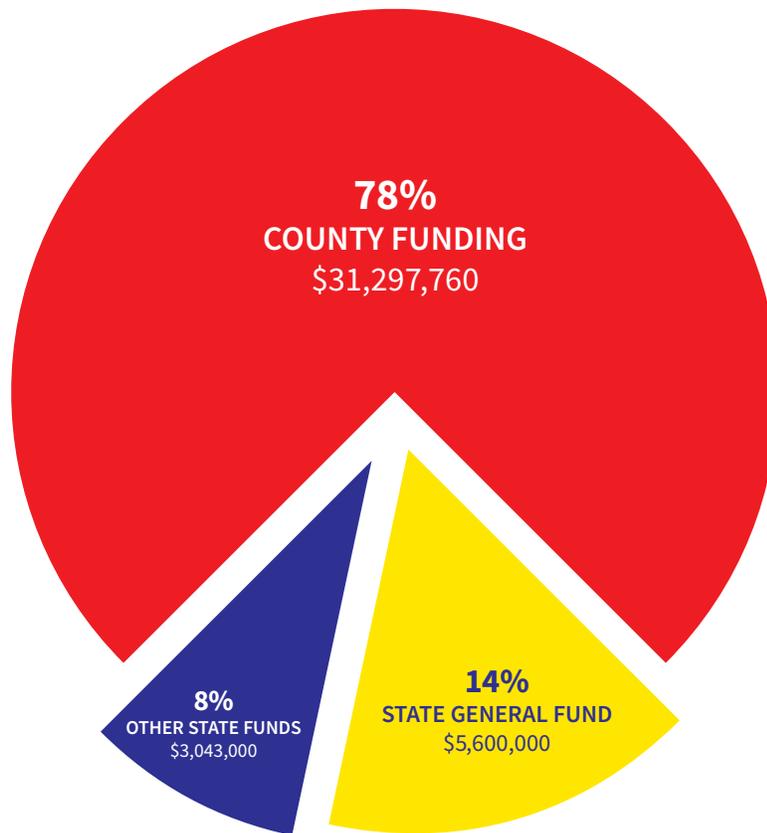
### Contra Costa County CVSO office broadcasts live online show for veterans

The Veterans' Voices monthly program can be seen live online on the County's website, Facebook, and on cable. Topics of concern to veterans are explored and viewers can ask a question or share their own experiences.

## 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 Medi-Cal 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 2020-21.

### FISCAL YEAR 2020-2021



### Total CVSOS Operating Costs: \$39,940,760

Sources: CalVet NCC Data FY 20-21, 2020-21 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, the legislature enacted Senate Bill 608 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. In 2021, the legislature and the Governor acknowledged the important work the CVSOS do for veterans and their families and approved an increase of \$5.4 million from the General Fund to bring the state's annual Local Assistance funding for CVSOS to \$11 million.



During fiscal years 1995 to 2020, the state appropriated \$86.4 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 \$8.04 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 \$8.04 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 \$8.04 billion.

It is critical that the CVSOs receive a steady stream of funding as many of the more than 20,000 servicemembers leaving the military annually and returning to California 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. This continues to result in 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. ■



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**Union Bank congratulates the California Association of County Veterans Service Officers for 75 years of providing service to California's veteran population.**

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## FINANCIAL IMPACT OF VETERANS CLAIMS BY COUNTY

The monetary veteran benefit statistics presented on the following pages provide data on the new federal veteran benefits obtained with the assistance of County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs).

The left section of the table shows the veteran population, by county, as determined by the US Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics and the numbers of veterans and family members who contacted a CVSO office in person or remotely in Fiscal Year 2020-21. Limitations imposed by COVID-19 greatly curtailed in-person visits to CVSO offices, prompting CVSOs to rely on phone, email, videoconferencing and other technology to serve the needs of veterans in their county. Meeting the needs of veterans who lack access to the internet and new technologies remained a challenge.

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 almost \$402 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 \$72 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 almost \$402 million  
in new federal veteran benefits being brought  
into California's economy.**

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**Monetary Impact of CVSO Activities - By County  
Fiscal Year 2020-21**

County	Veteran Population (Note 1)	Veterans & Family Members Contacting CVSO		New Awards Attributable to CVSOs (Note 2)		
		In Person	By Phone or Email	New Claims Submitted by CVSO	New Awards Obtained by CVSO	Average New Award Obtained by CVSO
ALAMEDA	50,828	181	935	738	\$495,737	\$672
ALPINE	89	No CVSO				
AMADOR	3,446	250	1,478	185	\$782,964	\$4,232
BUTTE	14,528	No Data Provided		1,130	\$6,323,870	\$5,596
CALAVERAS	4,309	893	2,193	282	\$1,324,534	\$4,697
COLUSA	811	597	5,975	158	\$2,021,790	\$12,796
CONTRA COSTA	47,863	11,331	15,000	2,279	\$17,683,945	\$7,760
DEL NORTE	2,026	100	300	190	\$623,317	\$3,281
EL DORADO	13,579	1,081	1,832	524	\$3,835,402	\$7,319
FRESNO	37,689	110	8,500	1,947	\$10,585,332	\$5,437
GLENN	1,358	1,500	1,800	79	\$820,778	\$10,390
HUMBOLDT	9,323	1,060	5,459	833	\$3,338,384	\$4,008
IMPERIAL	5,566	12	250	875	\$2,975,305	\$3,400
INYO-MONO	2,061	45	270	14	\$85,855	\$6,133

**Notes:** See last page of "Monetary Impact of CVSO Activities - By County"

County	CVSO	Telephone	Email
Alameda	Clint Taxdahl	510-577-1926	clinton.taxdahl@acgov.org
Alpine	Due to low veteran population, there is no CVSO		
Amador	Terry Sanders	209-223-6476	tsanders@amadorgov.org
Butte	Matthew McCoy	530-552-6608	mmccoy@buttecounty.net
Calaveras	Brian Galicia	209-754-6872	bgalicia@co.calaveras.ca.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	Terry Thomas	530-621-5963	terry.thomas@edcgov.us
Fresno	David Rose	559-600-5436	drose@co.fresno.ca.us
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	ggreen@inyocounty.us



**Monetary Impact of CVSO Activities - By County  
Fiscal Year 2020-21**

County	Veteran Population (Note 1)	Veterans & Family Members Contacting CVSO		New Awards Attributable to CVSOs (Note 2)		
		In Person	By Phone or Email	New Claims Submitted by CVSO	New Awards Obtained by CVSO	Average New Award Obtained by CVSO
KERN	38,382	475	11,478	2,739	\$9,247,697	\$3,376
KINGS	9,946	1,375	9,128	732	\$7,513,480	\$10,264
LAKE	4,920	5,500	11,000	778	\$5,033,421	\$6,470
LASSEN	2,010	400	6,000	128	\$73,205	\$572
LOS ANGELES	279,196	300	57,785	8,188	\$32,015,156	\$3,910
MADERA	7,110	10	5,300	418	\$2,973,061	\$7,113
MARIN	9,844	0	527	342	\$1,721,780	\$5,034
MARIPOSA	1,583	56	469	21	\$32,708	\$1,558
MENDOCINO	5,333	0	5,301	704	\$3,156,212	\$4,483
MERCED	9,086	1,626	9,870	1,090	\$145,616	\$134
MODOC	824	56	115	33	\$156,210	\$4,734
MONTEREY	19,876	1,183	10,580	1,304	\$10,996,660	\$8,433
NAPA	6,931	137	6,000	1,003	\$6,105,998	\$6,088
NEVADA	8,428	0	4,864	809	\$2,889,442	\$3,572

**Notes:** See last page of "Monetary Impact of CVSO Activities - 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	213-765-9680	rwong@mva.lacounty.gov
Madera	Joshua Christopherson	559-675-7766	Josh.Christopherson@co.madera.ca.gov
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	Glenn Galman	209-385-7588	glenn.galman@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 CVSO Activities - By County  
Fiscal Year 2020-21**

County	Veteran Population (Note 1)	Veterans & Family Members Contacting CVSO		New Awards Attributable to CVSOs (Note 2)		
		In Person	By Phone or Email	New Claims Submitted by CVSO	New Awards Obtained by CVSO	Average New Award Obtained by CVSO
ORANGE	116,429	905	19,411	2,270	\$6,842,835	\$3,014
PLACER	26,536	3,517	9,284	1,802	\$6,095,614	\$3,383
PLUMAS	1,772	70	361	183	\$1,327,521	\$7,254
RIVERSIDE	118,351	729	69,058	6,355	\$31,531,706	\$4,962
SACRAMENTO	84,339	6,841	10,746	1,561	\$6,118,150	\$3,919
SAN BENITO	2,476	679	1,064	228	\$1,911,802	\$8,385
SAN BERNARDINO	96,989	6,028	19,093	8,281	\$45,810,710	\$5,532
SAN DIEGO	249,807	320	78,750	9,856	\$14,552,530	\$1,477
SAN FRANCISCO	24,848	No Data Provided		1,121	\$2,609,810	\$2,328
SAN JOAQUIN	31,294	2,816	60,092	2,338	\$12,142,271	\$5,193
SAN LUIS OBISPO	17,370	411	14,567	1,263	\$9,407,234	\$7,448
SAN MATEO	24,001	46	7,085	608	\$5,369,631	\$8,832
SANTA BARBARA	20,386	3,120	28,500	1,359	\$10,018,611	\$7,372
SANTA CLARA	55,902	20	22,340	1,661	\$14,203,843	\$8,551

**Notes:** See last page of "Monetary Impact of CVSO Activities - By County"

County	CVSO	Telephone	Email
Orange	Elena Kim	714-480-6413	ocvso@occr.ocgov.com
Placer	Derrick Oliveira	916-780-3294	doliveira@placer.ca.gov
Plumas/Sierra	Bill Cook	530-283-6275	billcook@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	Don Johnston (Interim)	209-468-2916	djohnston@sjchcs.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@countyofsb.org
Santa Clara	David Till	408-918-4980	David.till@vets.sccgov.org



**Monetary Impact of CVSO Activities - By County  
Fiscal Year 2020-21**

County	Veteran Population (Note 1)	Veterans & Family Members Contacting CVSO		New Awards Attributable to CVSOs (Note 2)		
		In Person	By Phone or Email	New Claims Submitted by CVSO	New Awards Obtained by CVSO	Average New Award Obtained by CVSO
SANTA CRUZ	9,726	126	1,804	699	\$4,720,812	\$6,754
SHASTA	13,995	4,059	42,148	1,259	\$9,665,318	\$7,677
SIERRA	242	No CVSO				
SISKIYOU	3,735	591	2,540	246	\$1,843,263	\$7,493
SOLANO	33,038	350	14,500	4,070	\$23,961,433	\$5,887
SONOMA	24,589	786	5,479	977	\$10,702,901	\$10,955
STANISLAUS	21,482	450	19,884	2,106	\$13,517,631	\$6,419
TEHAMA	4,657	892	2,029	564	\$2,612,125	\$4,631
TRINITY	1,012	66	90	49	\$102,423	\$2,090
TULARE	14,923	1,227	10,589	997	\$6,133,456	\$6,152
TUOLUMNE	4,819	2,228	4,500	437	\$3,316,706	\$7,590
VENTURA	40,025	550	42,004	2,079	\$12,369,393	\$5,950
YOLO	8,132	No Data Provided		500	\$1,693,288	\$3,387
YUBA-SUTTER	11,581	4,662	2,805	1,442	\$10,248,836	\$7,107
STATEWIDE	1,659,401	69,767	671,132	81,834	\$401,787,712	\$4,910

**Notes:**

1. Veteran population estimates, as of September 30, published by USDVA National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics as "VetPop 2018".
2. 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 this Fiscal Year. 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	Vacant	707-784-6590	klbrook@solanocounty.com
Sonoma	Mark G. Orlando	707-565-5960	morlando@schsd.org
Stanislaus	Ryan Kegley	209-558-7380	Kegleyry@stancounty.com
Tehama	Shawn Bondon	530-529-3664	sbondon@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	Jim McHugh	805-477-5155	james.mchugh@ventura.org
Yolo	Salvador Torres	530-406-4850	Salvador.Torres@yolocounty.org
Yuba-Sutter	Marvin King, Jr.	530-749-6710	mking@coyuba.ca.us

## CALIFORNIA CVSOS DURING COVID



# A D A P T      A N D

**COVID-19 has dominated 2020 and 2021.** 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.”

Starting with the Presidential COVID-19 national emergency declaration in February 2020, followed by the statewide Stay-at-Home Order on March 19, 2020, county veterans service office operations have had to react to the appearance of COVID variants and numerous closure and social distancing public health orders — leading up to the Omicron variant of late 2021 and into 2022. For almost two years, CVSO operations have continued to adapt to the situation on the ground.

Prior to 2020, offices had operated predominantly via in-person outreach and meetings with veterans where an exchange and review of hard copy documents took place. During COVID, CVSOs and their staff 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.”

In order to continue serving California’s veterans during the pandemic, while still protecting public health, CVSOs adapted by implementing the following work-arounds:

- Transitioned from in-person claims processing to email, scanned and faxed claims.
- Invested in electronic document signing programs (i.e., Finger-Ink, etc.) to assist veterans in completing required claims online.





# O V E R C O M E

- 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 CVSOs adapted and overcame. And while claim activity during 2021 was understandably lower, CVSOs statewide served 69,767 veterans and family members in-person and 671,132 via phone calls and emails. This resulted in the filing of 81,834 claims for VA benefits on behalf of those veterans and their families. CVSOs continue to be one of the few county agencies that generate revenue for their general funds — and during this year, \$401,787,708 in new federal dollars were brought to California’s economy. This is a significant return on investment from a statewide program that costs approximately \$39 million to operate. ■

## **CONNECTING VETERANS TO BENEFITS**

### REAL STORIES, REAL LIVES CHANGED

California is home to over 1.6 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 CVSOs every day.

#### **AMADOR COUNTY — PERSEVERANCE NETS VIETNAM VETERAN AGENT ORANGE BENEFITS**

An Air Force veteran that served in Thailand during the Vietnam War wanted to file a claim for Diabetes Mellitus Type II (DMII) and contacted the Amador County CVSO office for assistance. DMII is one of the 41 Agent Orange diseases that the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has included on its list of presumptive illnesses due to Agent Orange and other types of herbicide exposure. Once the Amador County CVSO started working on his claim, he realized that the veteran's social security number (SSN) was incorrect on his Department of Defense (DoD) Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty (DD-214). To correct this, the CVSO filed a DoD form DD 149 with the Air Force, followed by a DMII claim with the VA using the correct SSN.

Several months later, the DMII claim was denied, stating that the veteran did not serve in Thailand. The CVSO then filed a Notice of Disagreement (NOD) with the VA. The VA again denied the claim, stating the vet had not served in Thailand. After calling the VA and completing their verification process, which is required before they will discuss the case, the CVSO learned that the VA had created two separate files on the veteran — one with the incorrect SSN and the other with the correct SSN. Both the claim and NOD were attached to the incorrect SSN. By this time, the veteran wanted to drop the claim, but the CVSO convinced him to stick with it. After several more calls and faxes to the VA, the CVSO got the veteran's file straightened out. However, while the file with the wrong SSN was deleted, the denied claims were now attached to the correct VA file.

The CVSO took the denied claim and the denied NOD and went to the next level: the Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA). He also requested and received the veteran's Official Military Personnel File (OMPF) from the National Personnel Records Center, a part of the National Archives. The OMPF listed the veteran's duty assignments and showed that he had indeed been assigned to Thailand as a part of the Air Force security forces. These airmen patrolled the fence lines of the airbases in that country — fence lines that were defoliated using Agent Orange. As a result of this new information, the BVA did not even bother with a hearing and the VA approved the claim. The veteran received the full benefit: VA disability rating of 80%, and \$85,000 in retroactive cash benefits, which he and his wife used to buy a home.

#### **CALAVERAS COUNTY — YEARS OF HOMELESSNESS ENDS FOR ONE VETERAN**

A cycle of destructive behavior that leads to homelessness and a hopeless situation is not an unfamiliar tale for many of our nation's veterans.

A Veteran's Outreach Coordinator (VOC) in the Calaveras County CVSO office was contacted by a homeless housing coordinator in a neighboring county regarding a veteran needing assistance with housing, records, and benefits. The veteran had been homeless for over three years and had been using drugs to cope with his mental health issues, which began a cycle of destruction for himself and his family. The VOC quickly began the process to get him housed and on track with healthcare.



As is the case with many veterans, this man suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) but did not know how to communicate that information properly to the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The VOC tackled the housing issue first by processing the VA applications, then located a place for the veteran to live within Calaveras County. Next, she worked to transfer the veteran's Medi-Cal benefits to Calaveras County so he could receive healthcare in the county. Simultaneously, a Veterans Service Representative (VSR) in the office gathered information regarding the veteran's disability, to prepare evidence for the processing of his VA disability claim. This effort was complicated by the fact that the veteran had been a reservist and had a traumatic event happen during Army Advanced Individual Training, a place where soldiers receive hands-on training and field instruction to become experts in that military specialty.

The search began in records from 1991. The veteran had some newspaper articles from the internet that mentioned the accident. The VSR then obtained the veteran's military medical file and records, which corroborated the event. A claim was developed and submitted to the VA to make a determination and render a disability rating. Ultimately, the veteran was awarded a 100% disability rating and \$25,000 in retroactive cash benefits for the period of time during which the file was being processed.

Today, the veteran is living independently and in his own home.

### **CALAVERAS COUNTY — GOING THE EXTRA MILE SECURES BENEFITS FOR SPOUSE OF DECEASED VETERAN**

A chance encounter resulted in a deserving outcome for the surviving spouse of a decorated Vietnam veteran.

The story began when a Veterans Service Representative (VSR) in the Calaveras County CVSO office received a phone call from a Vietnam veteran who had been wounded in the war and received a Purple Heart. The veteran informed the VSR that he was suffering from multiple illnesses. From his descriptions, the VSR knew the illnesses were considered presumptive indications of exposure to Agent Orange. The VSR asked him to come to the office to sign a claim form for the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Time passed after the VSR filed the claim, but she did not hear anything from the veteran regarding the results of his claim. This was not unusual, however, because the VA takes several steps to process a claim. The veteran never contacted the VSR again.

The next chapter in the story came sometime later, when the surviving spouse of a local veteran contacted the CVSO with some hats her deceased husband had collected. She wondered if the CVSO would like to give the hats to local veterans. Being unable to accept personal items, CVSO staff suggested that she take the hats to the local VFW or American Legion posts, whereupon the woman thanked them and gave them her contact information. Walking back to her office, the VSR decided to look up the woman's name and address in her system and discovered that the widow's spouse was the veteran she had helped the previous year. She then looked up the veteran in the VA's portal, a database of documents sent to the VA, and was able to view the Death Certificate. The veteran had passed away from an Agent Orange related illness a few months after he had seen the VSR.

Of interest to the VSR was the lack of documents submitted for the surviving spouse. She reviewed all the information and then called the spouse the next day, explained that there were several benefits that she was eligible for, due to her husband dying from Agent Orange-related conditions. The VSR worked with the spouse to submit all required documents to the VA. The final chapter was written months later when the widow was awarded benefits for surviving spouses, along with burial benefits. The VA awarded benefits retroactively to the veteran's date of passing and his surviving spouse received a \$11,852 lump sum payment and will receive \$1,357 monthly for the rest of her life.

### **COLUSA COUNTY — CVSO, STAND DOWN COLLABORATE TO OBTAIN SCOOTER FOR WWII COMBAT VETERAN**

The Colusa County CVSO was approached by the daughter of a 96-year-old World War II veteran, whom the CVSO had worked with in the past. The daughter was seeking a mobility scooter for her father because he was having trouble getting around. The veteran had applied to the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for a scooter, but the request had been denied for a variety of technical reasons.



However, sensing that time was of the essence with Christmas only a week away, the CVSO wanted to expedite the process. The veteran had sustained combat wounds in France in 1945 resulting in major leg and ankle injuries. Utilizing his close working relationship with the neighboring Yuba-Sutter Stand Down organization, the CVSO approached them for help. The Stand Down volunteers came through and a scooter was procured and donated to the veteran in time for Christmas.

Stand Downs are organized in many counties across the US and were started to assist homeless veterans. The name Stand Down was modeled after the Stand Down concept used during the Vietnam War, which provided a safe area to rest and recuperate for units returning from combat operations. Troops were able to take care of personal hygiene, obtain clean uniforms, enjoy warm meals, receive medical and dental care, and receive mail from home. A Stand Down gave battle-weary soldiers the opportunity to renew their spirit, health and overall sense of well-being.

Stand Downs for homeless veterans are organized by volunteers coming together as a non-profit corporation. While Stand Down organizations operate year-round obtaining and distributing donations to veterans in need, their main event is a yearly, three-day intervention designed to address the despair of homelessness. The Yuba-Sutter Stand Down works with homeless veterans, veterans, active duty personnel, and their families to obtain housing

(rent/house payments), VA claims (with the CVSO), medical, dental, vision, social security, clothing and food. CVSOs in the various counties are partners in these efforts and some are members of the Stand Down volunteer staff. CVSOs also play an integral role in these events by assisting homeless veterans to file for their VA and state veterans' benefits. Stand Down operates out of a conviction that the overwhelming number of homeless veterans on the streets is unacceptable, and that the veteran community itself must respond to address the need.

## **CONTRA COSTA COUNTY — COLLEGE TUITION FEE WAIVER OBTAINED DUE TO EXPANSION OF AGENT ORANGE ELIGIBILITY**

In 1941, Sir Winston Churchill gave a speech as England continued to struggle against Nazi Germany. Churchill admonished boys at the private boarding school that he attended in 1888, "never give in, never give in, never, never, never — in nothing, great or small, large or petty — never give in except to the convictions of honour and good sense."

This World War II era speech may have recently been recast by the Contra Costa County veterans service office.

In 2014, the son of a deceased Navy veteran contacted this office to determine whether he was entitled to educational benefits. The College Fee Waiver for Veteran Dependents benefit (CFW) waives mandatory systemwide tuition and fees at any State of California Community College, California State University, or University of California campus. This program does not cover the expense of books, parking or room and board. There are four plans under which dependents of veterans may be eligible; one is for the child of a veteran who has a service-connected disability or had a service-connected disability at the time of death or died of service-related causes.

While discussing the son's CFW eligibility, it was unclear as to whether his father had a documented service-connected disability prior to his passing. The CVSO was not able to file for the benefit because the father did not have a certified service-connected disability at the time of his death. Not giving up on the case, CVSO staff conducted an extensive search of the father's military file and determined that the son may be eligible for the US Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Dependent and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) program because the veteran had served in the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and later died of an Agent Orange (AO) related condition. A claim was filed in 2015 but denied by the VA because the father had been in Korea in 1968, which was not an eligible geographical zone for AO benefits.



However, Congress expanded conditions of eligibility for benefits for Vietnam and DMZ veterans through the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019. The Contra Costa CVSOS filed a new claim, and the VA granted the father a service-connected cause of death, thereby making his son eligible for the CFW program.

### **CONTRA COSTA COUNTY — CVSOS MAINTAINS HIGH LEVEL OF SERVICE DESPITE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

A timely investment in new technology benefited veterans living in Contra Costa County during the COVID pandemic.

Utilizing a “virtual office,” the Contra Costa CVSOS was able to successfully guide veterans through the process of securing federal and state benefits without in-person meetings. One example is a veteran who works as a postal carrier who needed assistance filing a claim for disability compensation for injuries received during his military service. The veteran, from the convenience of his cell phone, was able to receive assistance from the CVSOS in discussing his claim and completed the application for benefits from the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) while he was in his mail delivery truck during lunch break.

The Contra Costa County CVSOS office has served about 2,650 veterans and dependents since March 6, 2020.

### **KING’S COUNTY — VETERAN’S MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION LINKED TO MILITARY SERVICE AFTER FOUR DECADES**

A Marine Corps veteran discharged during boot camp in 1978 struggled to gain a foothold in society, ultimately arriving at a veterans’ medical center for a mental health concern.

The military discharge was based on “frequent involvement of a discreditable nature with military authorities.” The veteran’s mother was upset because her son was of sound mind and health before enlisting in the Marine Corps. At her urging, the veteran filed claims for having incurred a mental health condition while in the service, however the VA denied these claims on three separate occasions, finding that the veteran’s condition existed prior to service.

Following a move to California years later, the veteran and his family visited the Kings County CVSOS office to submit a VA Supplemental Claim. The year was 2020 — over four decades after the discharge from service. A Supplemental Claim is used to add new evidence that’s relevant to a case or identifying new evidence for review. The Veterans Service Representative (VSR) reviewed the veteran’s records and found that the initial veterans medical center records were not part of his previous claims. The VSR assisted the veteran in requesting the missing records, which revealed the veteran had been diagnosed with a mental health condition three times while in the service and once at the initial veterans’ medical center within one year of separation from the service.

Through the Kings County CVSOS office, the veteran was referred to a local mental health provider to obtain a nexus statement using the new medical evidence obtained by the VSR. The VSR went one step further and accompanied the veteran to a psychiatrist appointment to explain the veteran’s history and what the VA was looking for in a nexus letter. The VSR wrote a detailed argument proving that the veteran was of sound mind prior to entering service and that the record clearly demonstrated that his mental health condition was incurred in service.

A Supplemental Claim was filed, along with the new evidence, and the VA subsequently awarded the veteran a 100% disability rating resulting in monthly compensation of \$3,915. The veteran is also now able to receive much needed VA healthcare and the family is thankful for the care and compensation the veteran is receiving. The Kings County CVSOS office is now assisting the veteran with a claim for retroactive pay from the claim first denied in 1982.

## **LAKE COUNTY — CVSO REACHES OUT TO VETERANS WHO RECEIVED DISCHARGES FOR SEXUAL ORIENTATION, MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA, PTSD, AND TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY**

Many veterans are eligible for benefits from the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and some are eligible for Department of Defense (DoD) and/or California benefits and programs. Some veterans may not be eligible for many of these benefits because they received a military discharge below that of an Honorable Discharge, the most common classification of separation.

It has been estimated that over 110,000 servicemembers were kicked out of the military due to their sexual orientation between 1945 and 2011. Those policies prohibited LGBTQ veterans from serving. Veterans who were discharged under those policies are now able to apply to have their discharge status upgraded, which could enable them to apply for veterans' benefits previously denied to them. But, like most veterans' benefits, every individual's situation of service is different, and all applications must be decided on a case-by-case basis. Further complicating the process, an appeal must be made to the specific branch the veteran served in, each having its own discharge review board. Once that process is completed, then the veteran can apply for the appropriate VA programs and benefits, such as college scholarships, healthcare, housing, etc.

Many LGBTQ veterans have not sought upgrades because they are hesitant to relive painful memories or are unaware their discharge can be upgraded. Unfair discharges were also given in the past for mental health conditions such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), sexual assault or harassment.

The Lake County CVSO office has made outreach and assistance with discharge upgrades one of their priorities, resulting in 129 upgrade claims submitted in 2021 via the DoD's "Reviews of Discharges" (Form DD-293) and "Applications for Correction of Military Records" (Form DD-149). These forms are submitted along with a personal statement of the alleged injustices, as well as personal statements from people they served with. It is very important to complete these forms in their entirety as they may not be processed due to lack of information. Out of Lake County CVSO's 129 upgrade claims in 2021, 72 were returned with a positive outcome.

Word of the Lake County CVSO office's expertise on this issue has spread and veterans from other states, counties, and even other countries have contacted the office for assistance. They trust the CVSO and staff based on their level of empathy when providing these services.

## **LOS ANGELES COUNTY — ROADMAP TO RETIREMENT; TRANSITION FROM ACTIVE DUTY TO CIVILIAN LIFE**

A 32-year Air Force veteran successfully managed his transition from active duty to civilian life utilizing the program offered by the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet), in conjunction with the services provided by the Los Angeles County Department of Military & Veterans Affairs (CVSO office).

Prior to retirement, the Air Force veteran filed for his disability claim and education benefits and also had a post retirement civilian job lined up. The veteran wisely followed the advice provided by CalVet's Transitional Assistance Program (CalTAP) and charted a three-point roadmap to success. He first attended a CalTAP webinar, which focused on informing and connecting veterans of all eras to their earned federal and state benefits and a community-based system of care. He then attended extra webinars offered by CalVet, where he heard a guest speaker from the Los Angeles CVSO office speak about the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability submission process. This Veterans Service Representative (VSR) and others like her provide transition presentations every six months at local military bases.

Following the webinar, the veteran asked the VSR if she would represent him, and she immediately got to work. Within a few weeks, the veteran received a call from the VA to attend medical appointments to evaluate his disability claims. After medical examinations were completed, the VA informed him he would get a disability rating soon after retiring. The VSR then recommended that the veteran attend a Department of Defense program called "Skill Bridge," which teaches soon-to-be separating servicemembers how to apply their military job skills in the civilian workforce and how to get up-to-speed on the current job market's practices, demands, and requirements. As a result of utilizing these free services offered by the VA, CalVet, and the CVSOs, the veteran finished the VA process early and was able to focus on his retirement ceremony rather than deal with an onslaught of issues post-retirement. As the veteran underwent this process during the pandemic, the CVSO



office was able to assist this veteran in navigating the VA system remotely using Finger-Ink to sign benefits applications — a program that simplified the lives of all involved during a stressful time.

### **NAPA COUNTY — VETERAN RELEASED FROM PRISON SECURES HOUSING AND BENEFITS**

A routine notification of the release of a state prisoner turned into a great story for one Napa County veteran.

The California Department of Corrections notified the Napa County CVSO that a veteran in custody had listed Napa as his intended county of residence upon release. The CVSO flagged the name, advised the Veterans Services Representative (VSR), and together they developed a quick reaction checklist to connect the veteran with all eligible US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits.

When the veteran called a few weeks later, the VSR immediately recognized the name. The office had recently reopened for in-person visits and the VSR was able to meet with him the same day. A File Review was initiated with the VA that revealed the veteran had a service-connected disability rating of 0%. Such a rating is also referred to as a non-compensable rating and means the VA recognizes the veteran has a service-connected disability, but their current condition is not severe enough to qualify for monthly cash benefits. The VSR developed a claim to increase the rating and added new conditions based on an interview with the veteran.

While the VA was processing the claim, the veteran mentioned he did not have a phone and was having trouble securing a place to live. It was a Friday afternoon, but the VSR contacted the Homeless Veteran Outreach Coordinator at the VA Clinic in Martinez, who personally delivered a phone to Napa. The veteran was able to make the necessary calls and was housed by that evening. Meanwhile, the disability rating increase claim had been flagged as “homeless” by the VA and thus expedited, resulting in a decision within 30 days.

Today, the veteran has an 80 percent VA disability rating, along with the attendant monthly cash benefits, and has moved to more suitable housing. He still calls the Napa CVSO office to check in and advise them of his status and credits the experience as “restoring his faith in the system.”

### **ORANGE COUNTY — LINKING MEDICAL SYMPTOMS TO GULF WAR SYNDROME BRINGS VETERAN LIFETIME BENEFITS**

A Marine Corps Gulf War veteran suffering from brain cancer believed Gulf War Syndrome was the cause, but claims he had previously filed with the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in 2014 and 2017 did not result in appropriate disability compensation. The problem? He had no medical evidence to support his claim.

Seeking help from the Orange County CVSO office, a Veterans Claims Representative (VCR) worked with the veteran to develop a strategy to prove he was eligible for a higher rating. Upon reviewing the veteran’s medical files, the VCR noticed that a “link to service” was missing, which is needed to help prove that exposure to carcinogens from the burning of oil wells during the war was the cause of the brain cancer. The VCR advised the veteran to contact his healthcare provider and request medical evidence, such as physical therapy, to clearly demonstrate the veteran’s right-sided weakness to support residual hemiparesis. The VA has recognized medically unexplained illnesses (popularly called “Gulf War Syndrome”) as associated with military service in the Gulf War. The VCR also requested that the veteran provide pictures of himself in front of burning oil wells, and more information on the veteran’s unit assignment during the Gulf War. She found an article from a scientific journal that discussed how carcinogens from burning oil wells during the war caused cancer and instructed the veteran to submit that with his claim.

Several follow up emails were exchanged between the VCR and the veteran to ensure that he was making progress on his claim. With 28 new pages of medical evidence, three photos of the Marine in-country standing next to burning oil wells, and the scientific journal article in hand, the VCR created a Statement in Support to submit to the VA with the veterans claims. A Statement of Support (VA Form 21-4138) is used to submit a statement from a witness with firsthand knowledge of information you believe will help support the request for VA benefits; sometimes this is

a “buddy statement” from a person that served with the veteran and can attest to location, situation, or other factors relevant to when the injury occurred. It is possible that an event or injury that occurs during combat may never be recorded by a veteran’s military unit.

The tenacity of both the veteran and VCR resulted in the VA approving a 100% disability rating for brain cancer, along with Special Monthly Compensation for Aid and Attendance. The veteran received a \$32,623 retroactive payment and will receive \$3,476 a month for the rest of his life. In this case, it was the VCR’s ability to link the symptoms to the veteran’s in-country exposure and articulate that information to the medical provider, in turn enabling the doctor to feel comfortable writing the medical opinion.

Although the effort put forth by the VCR ended in a successful outcome for this veteran, the VCR expressed concerns to her supervisor about her lack of medical experience in dealing with the claim.

“Don’t worry about not having all the medical experience,” the supervisor said. “You are going to learn what you need by doing the work. You are going to learn things along the way, on the path, that you will find success in and then you can use that experience to help the next veteran.”

This VCR was one of the new hires made possible after the Orange County Board of Supervisors approved new funding for the CVSO office, based on the increased local assistance funding approved by the State Legislature and the Governor in 2021.

### **PLACER COUNTY — CVSO, VETERANS GROUPS HELP WIDOW ACHIEVE FINANCIAL STABILITY**

Grieving the loss of her late husband, the widow of an Air Force veteran needed assistance with filing a claim for survivor benefits with the US Department of Defense (DoD). She had also fallen behind on her utility bills. She contacted the Placer County CVSO office for assistance.

After meeting with her and assessing her needs, the CVSO determined that the widow was eligible to apply for the DoD’s Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP). The SBP allows a military retiree to ensure a continuous lifetime annuity for their dependents following their death. The CVSO assisted the widow in filing the claim for SBP, and then went above and beyond the call of duty by contacting the Placer County Veterans Advisory Council (VAC), a collaborative body of representatives from local veterans’ service organizations throughout Placer County, to see if any veterans’ groups could assist the widow with her utility bills.

Within a day, local American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars Posts stepped up to pay the full amount of her utility bills, which totaled \$2,000, to help her get back on her feet. The opportunity for the Placer County VAC and the CVSO office to come together to assist a widow in her time of need was a beautiful gesture of solidarity within the veteran community. The DoD also subsequently granted the widow a \$1,400 per month SBP benefit.

### **SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY — VETERAN IN COSTA RICA REMOTELY APPLIES FOR VA BENEFITS**

Service in the United States military has provided a second chance for a Costa Rican native who was deported as a result of a crime.

The Costa Rican immigrated to the United States with his parents as a child and later enlisted in the US Army Reserve, where he was proud to serve his new country and support his family. The man was activated in 1990 during the Gulf War in Operation Desert Storm, where he served in Iraq on a 6-month deployment in a Medical Army Surgical Hospital unit. Ten years after his return from Iraq, he found himself in trouble with the law and served six years in the California prison system. He was deported back to Costa Rica when released from prison in 2007 because he was a Green Card holder, returning to a country where he had not lived or visited for nearly 40 years.

Back in Costa Rica, the veteran worked with attorneys to develop a legal pathway back to the United States and citizenship. He was unable to apply for any US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits. His family, who still resided in California, suggested that he try to obtain veteran



benefits through the San Bernardino CVSO office. The CVSO made contact with him during the pandemic and discussed the process of applying for VA benefits and being compensated for his service-related injuries.

Following a preliminary Intent to File document with the VA, the CVSO then set about researching and planning how to best prepare the veteran's claim for a service-connected disability. During his research, the CVSO learned that the VA had a contract with a medical facility in Heredia, Costa Rica, very close to where the veteran lived. This facility is contracted with Veteran Evaluation Services, a company which assists the VA in addressing the backlog of veterans' VA claims that require compensation and/or pension evaluations. The CVSO was able to complete the veteran's claim electronically, utilizing the Finger-Ink system for remote signatures. The claim was filed and several months later the veteran was scheduled for an evaluation.

The veteran was subsequently awarded a 50% disability rating from the VA with the attendant monthly monetary compensation, thereby stabilizing his situation while he continues his quest to return to the United States. This would not have been possible without the work of the San Bernardino CVSO.

### **SHASTA COUNTY — VETERANS AND HUMAN SERVICES STAFF COLLABORATE TO ASSIST VETERANS**

Veterans and civilians seeking government assistance both benefit when county offices work together.

The California Department of Healthcare Services finances and administers individual healthcare service delivery programs like Medi-Cal, which provides healthcare services to low-income people. Applicants for Medi-Cal must be screened to determine eligibility and other factors including veteran status. The Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) performs the initial screening in Shasta County. If an applicant is a veteran, HHSA staff fills out a Form MC-05, or Military Verification and Referral. This completed form is sent to the Shasta County CVSO office where staff evaluate eligibility for federal and state veterans' benefits, including US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) pensions, medical coverage, prescription drugs, medical devices, or family benefits (widows, children, or other dependents). Securing veterans' benefits provides greater protection for a family's financial assets, since federal VA benefits do not need to be paid back. Securing federal veterans' benefits frees up Medi-Cal funds for others in the community who need government assistance.

The success of the Shasta CVSO's Military Verification and Referral program begins with helping HHSA representatives understand the functions of the CVSO office and the work to process MC-05 verification requests. The CVSO trains new HHSA personnel to facilitate timely completion of the MC-05 process. The CVSO staff reviews the MC-05 to ensure information is complete, since paperwork submitted with incorrect or missing information can result in a delay of up to two weeks. MC-05s are processed by CVSO staff the same day if received by 2 pm, which allows contact with the VA's nearest Pension Management Center in St. Paul, Minnesota. Coordinating the work of the CVSO office with Shasta County HHSA results in more veterans directed to the proper VA programs and benefits.

### **SOLANO COUNTY — VETERANS SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE HELPS WIDOW INCREASE VA PENSION**

Military life can be very stressful on families. Long separations, frequent moves, inconsistent training schedules, and the toll of mental and physical injuries on both servicemembers and their families can all add up over time.

All county veterans service offices serve not only the veteran, but the military family as well. A Veterans Service Representative (VSR) in the Solano County CVSO office had been assisting a veteran since 2018 and upon his death, continued assisting his surviving spouse. The Vietnam veteran had served in the "Blue Water Navy" — a term that distinguishes between those Navy personnel who served on ships off the coast of Vietnam (Blue Water Navy) and those who served on small craft on the inland waterways and delta of Vietnam (Brown Water Navy).

Prior to his death, the veteran had been receiving a US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability pension and Aid and Attendance (a VA program to defray the costs of in-home care) due to dementia caused by Parkinson's Disease. In 2019, Congress passed the Blue Water

Navy Vietnam Veterans Act, which extended the benefits for health effects due to Agent Orange to sailors who were exposed to the defoliant off-shore. Upon learning of this expansion, the spouse filed a claim with the VA seeking to link her husband's Parkinson's with his Vietnam service. The VA began working on the claim and the veteran attended several compensation and pension eligibility exams. Unfortunately, the veteran passed away during this process. But that is not the end of the story.

The veteran's widow visited the Solano CVSO office and asked the VSR to file a claim for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC), which provides surviving spouses, children, or parents of a servicemember who died in the line of duty, or died from a service-related injury or illness, to get the tax-free DIC monetary benefit. The VSR filed for a DIC claim, then filed for Substitution of Claimant. The DIC was quickly granted, however the Substitution of Claimant took longer. The VSR stayed on the case and the widow was ultimately acknowledged as the claimant and received a retroactive cash award of \$106,778.

### **TUOLUMNE COUNTY — WIDOW SEEKS VA HEADSTONE; CVSO SECURES ADDITIONAL BENEFITS**

A veteran's widow contacted the Tuolumne County CVSO office seeking an appointment to obtain a headstone from the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The VA furnishes a government headstone or marker for any deceased eligible veteran upon request and at no charge to the applicant.

The Veterans Service Representative (VSR) made sure that the widow had possession of the death certificate, then checked to make sure the veteran's DD-214 (discharge document) was in the CVSO system. When the widow came in for the appointment, the VSR determined that the widow's deceased husband was a Vietnam veteran and had died from prostate cancer. The VSR informed the widow that her husband had died from a disease that has been linked to Agent Orange (AO) exposure during the Vietnam War. The VA considers prostate cancer to be one of the presumptive diseases caused by AO. Veterans do not have to provide a link between their condition and their service to qualify for a service-connected disability, but the claimant does need to prove that they were in a place and time period where AO was deemed to have been used. Time and place are subject to change due to changes in federal regulations and sometimes expansion of the benefit by Congress.

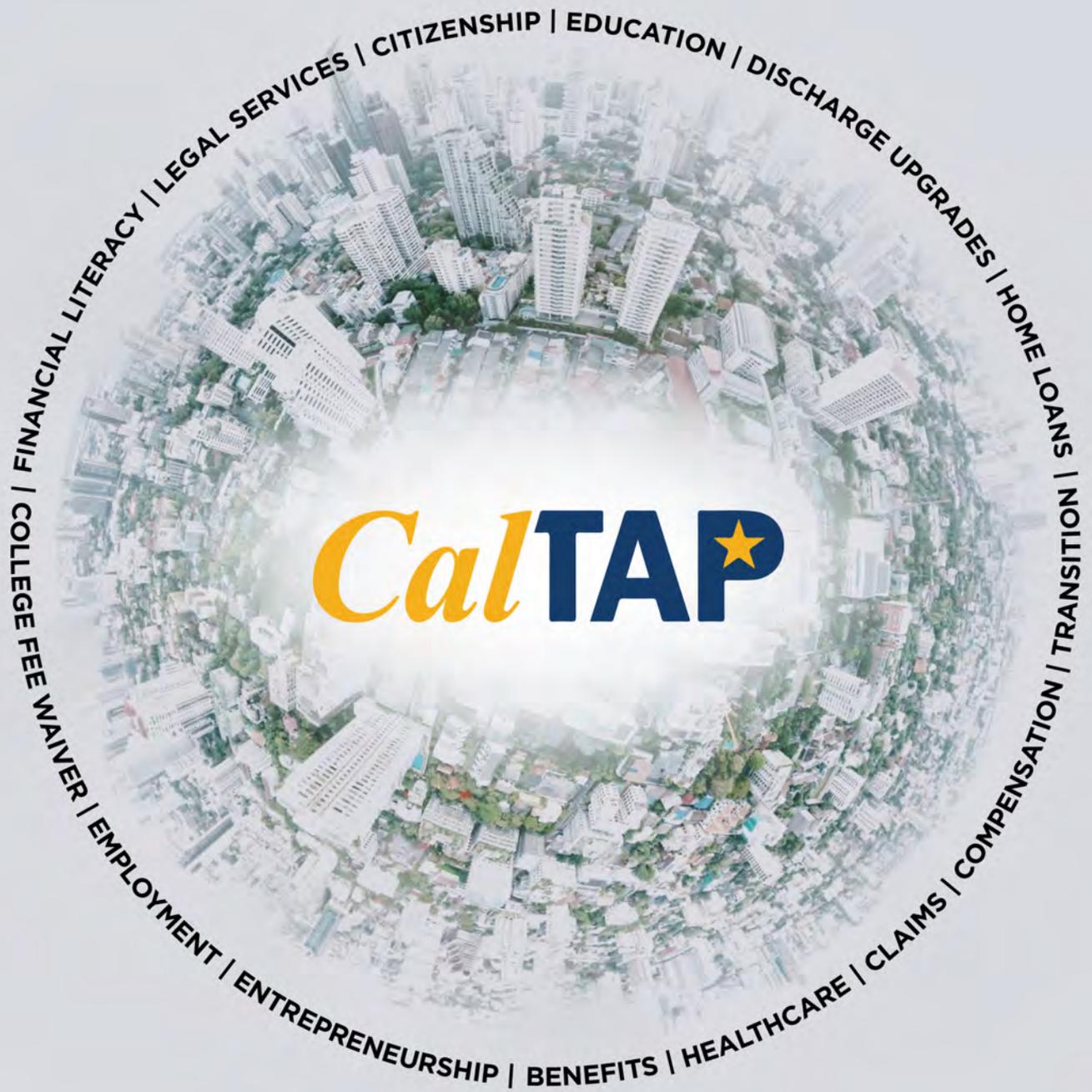
The VSR also informed the widow that she was eligible to apply for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC), which provides surviving spouses, children, or parents of a servicemember who died in the line of duty, or died from a service-related illness, to get a tax-free DIC monetary benefit. A few months later, the widow was awarded DIC, whereupon the VSR then enrolled her in the VA's Civilian Health and Medical Program that covers the cost of some healthcare services and supplies. This allowed the widow to drop her existing supplemental Medicare program, saving over \$300 per month.

### **TUOLUMNE COUNTY — VETERAN IN LONG-TERM CARE GAINS NEW REPAYMENT PLAN**

The family of an Air Force veteran visited the Tuolumne County CVSO office during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic seeking additional monetary benefits to help cover the veteran's healthcare facility costs. The veteran was already receiving some compensation from the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), but not enough to cover his time in the facility.

The office filed a claim for a VA program called Aid and Attendance (A&A), which provides monthly payments for veterans requiring aid and attendance or who are housebound. These benefits are added to the amount of the veteran's current monthly VA pension. The VA subsequently granted the A&A benefit, however because of the pandemic's access restrictions and lockdowns, the care facility did not notify the family of the extent of the bill until the veteran left the facility. The bill for the facility exceeded \$30,000. The CVSO office once again got involved to help the family negotiate a repayment plan for \$17,000, saving the family about half of the cost. ■





# CalTAP

The 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.

For more information on CalTAP programs visit [www.calvet.ca.gov](http://www.calvet.ca.gov) or e-mail us at [caltap@calvet.ca.gov](mailto:caltap@calvet.ca.gov)



## LEGISLATORS OF THE YEAR AWARDS

The California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO) selected Senator Bob Archuleta (D-Pico Rivera) and Assemblywoman Cottie Petrie-Norris (D-Laguna Beach) as the recipients of the Motomu Nakasako Legislator of the Year award for 2021.



### **SENATOR BOB ARCHULETA (D-PICO RIVERA)**

Senator Archuleta was elected in 2018 to the State Senate to represent the 32nd Senate District, which spans Los Angeles and Orange counties and includes the cities of Downey, Norwalk, Pico Rivera, Whittier, La Mirada, Buena Park, Santa Fe Springs, Cerritos, Bellflower, and Commerce. Prior to the Senate, he served as the Mayor of Pico Rivera. While in the State Senate, he has served as the Chair of the Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, as well as a member of the Business, Professions and Economic Development, Governmental Organization, and Transportation and Insurance committees.

Archuleta has strong ties to the military. As a young man, he served in the United States Army's 82nd Airborne Division. During the presidency of Barack Obama, Archuleta was appointed as a member of the Board of Visitors to the United States Military Academy at West Point, subsequently being selected as Vice Chair. He has also served on the Los Angeles County Military and Veterans Affairs Commission and the United States Army Advisory Board for Military Recruitment. In 2019, Governor Newsom appointed him to the Governor's Military Council. Archuleta's two sons have graduated from West Point and are currently serving in the military.

Legislation that helps veterans, servicemembers, and their families has clearly been a priority with the Senator. During the 2019-20 legislative session, he authored measures to give preferences to military dependents seeking home- and community-based services, improve the Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise Program, develop an MOU between civilian and military law enforcement regarding child abuse investigations, and help the California National Guard's Support fund.

In 2021, Senator Archuleta spearheaded the push in the Senate to increase the state's Local Assistance funding to counties for CVSOs from \$5.6 million to \$11 million. The CACVSO had been trying for years to get the increase from the state budget and Senator Archuleta's unflagging sponsorship of this effort in the Senate brought it to fruition. The CVSOs now can use the increased funding to hire more Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs), train them, and put them to work helping veterans file for their benefits from the US Department of Veterans Affairs.





### **ASSEMBLYWOMAN COTTIE PETRIE-NORRIS (D-LAGUNA BEACH)**

Assemblywoman Petrie-Norris was elected in 2018 to the State Assembly to represent the 74th Assembly District, which is located in Orange County and includes the cities of Costa Mesa, Huntington Beach, Irvine, Laguna Beach, Laguna Woods, and Newport Beach. Prior to the Assembly, she had a career in finance and technology and helped build businesses and lead teams at Fortune 500 corporations, small companies and start-ups. While in the Assembly, she has served on the Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, as well as being the Chair of the Accountability and Administrative Review Committee, and a member of the Banking and Finance, Jobs, Economic Development, and the Economy, and the Revenue & Taxation committees.

Petrie-Norris' father and stepfather both served in the military. In her district, she convenes a Veterans Advisory every other month composed of veteran leaders to discuss key issues facing veterans, such as housing, mental health, and the proposed state veterans cemetery for Orange County.

Petrie-Norris authored legislation, which was subsequently signed in to law, to expand coordination of pro bono legal assistance to active-duty servicemembers and their families who could otherwise not afford legal services. Servicemembers and their families previously had no access to free legal

assistance for complex legal actions such as civil litigation, citizenship, immigration, and special needs educational concerns. The Department of Defense noted in support of the bill that over 60% of active duty servicemembers are in the first five enlisted pay grades, and connecting them to organizations providing pro bono legal aid would fill a much-needed gap.

In 2021, Assemblywoman Petrie-Norris spearheaded the push in the Assembly to increase the state's Local Assistance funding to counties for CVSOs from \$5.6 million to \$11 million. The CACVSO had been trying for years to get the increase from the state budget and Assemblywoman Petrie-Norris' tenacious pursuit of this goal in the Assembly resulted in success. The CVSOs now can use the increased funding to hire more Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs), train them, and put them to work helping veterans file for their benefits from the US Department of Veterans Affairs.

**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**

- 2020 — Assemblyman Jim Frazier (*second award*)
- 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

## LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM 2022

Thanks to the \$5.4 million Local Assistance funding increase from the state budget provided by the legislature and Governor in 2021, the CVSOs are eager to increase “boots on the ground” by hiring new Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs) who can help process claims and provide outreach to underserved populations of veterans. In addition to ensuring CVSOs have appropriate funding for their vital services, the California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO) also advocates for state policies and programs which will benefit California’s veterans and their families, as well as active-duty servicemembers, reservists, and National Guard personnel. The CACVSO also works closely with veterans service organizations to sponsor and support legislation in support of this goal.

### 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. 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.”

- **Jobs**

Support legislation that would streamline and/or provide affordability to veterans seeking occupations after their military service. In addition to veterans receiving their earned VA benefits and procuring housing, obtaining a job in an occupation which provides stability and self-reliance is of the utmost importance to financial and mental well-being.

### 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 providers 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 to remove the \$5 DMV fee for obtaining the “VETERAN” designation on the California driver’s license.
- 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.



CEI commends the California Association of County Veterans Service Officers for over 75 years of dedicated service to California’s veterans and their families.

**CALIFORNIA**  
**VETERANS** FOR  
**SECURE AND AFFORDABLE**  
**ENERGY**

[energyindependenceca.com](http://energyindependenceca.com)  
[caveteransforsecureenergy.com](http://caveteransforsecureenergy.com)

## **CALIFORNIA VETERANS SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE ACADEMY:**

CALVET PROVIDES CVSO STAFF THE TRAINING REQUIRED BY STATE LAW TO PASS AND MAINTAIN ACCREDITATION WITH THE FEDERAL VA

### **Overview**

The intent of the California Veterans Service Representative Academy (CVSRA) is to train County Veterans Service Office (CVSO) staff for the job of preparing veterans claims for benefits, instilling in each new staff member the working knowledge of federal, state and local veteran benefit programs and the skills necessary to develop and submit high-quality claims to the US Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration (VA) benefits. The standardized curriculum ensures county Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs), who are required by state law to pass and maintain VA accreditation in order to file claims on behalf of the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet), all receive the same high-level training which in turn prevents future claims and appeals backlogs through the submission of quality claim packages to the VA.

The CVSRA includes two phases of classroom training and three months of on-the-job training (OJT) in preparation for the CalVet accreditation exam. In non-pandemic times, both phases of classroom training are offered in northern and southern California to accommodate CVSO staff from across the state.

In response to the COVID-19 Pandemic and the continued demand for the academy, CalVet quickly transitioned from in-person trainings to trainings delivered via a virtual platform. In June of 2020, CalVet offered the very first virtual CVSRA to 15 students. Based on the success of that initial training and the continued demand for additional training, 12 additional virtual trainings have been conducted since that time and more are scheduled for 2022.

### **VA Accreditation Examination**

The examination covers knowledge of the VA's compensation and pension programs, procedures for filing claims, procedures for appealing denied claims, and familiarity with Title 38 of the US Code pertaining to veterans benefits as well as sections of Title 38 of the Code of Federal Regulations. Knowledge of ethical standards is also required.

### **Community Partnerships**

The CVSRA is a true partnership between the 56 County Veterans Service Offices, CalVet and the VA Regional Offices in California. With three levels of training, continuous feedback and periodic checks and balances, the county partners are truly set up to succeed. The positive impact of this success on the community is significant. Claim packages are prepared accurately and in a timely fashion ensuring the veteran receives his/her award more quickly. Tribal VSRs are also encouraged to attend CVSRA and become accredited by CalVet as allowed by the US Code of Federal Regulations.

In addition to the CalVet Home Office, CalVet also has three District Offices co-located within the VA Regional Offices in Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Diego. These District Office managers provide over 20 years of experience to the classes. This early introduction to office staff also allows CalVet and the county employees to develop strong working relationships from the very beginning of the students' careers. From the start of their claims work, new CVSO staff know who to contact at each CalVet District Office with claims questions and issues. District Offices also provide ongoing feedback to the accredited county VSRs to ensure claim issues are quickly identified and addressed and each VSR continues to develop.

### **Overview of Performance Metrics**

2020-21 brought new challenges to maintaining the standard of claims representation which CalVet continued to meet while transitioning to virtual training platforms. In 2021, 95% of the 49 VSRs who took the VA's accreditation test passed.



## CACVSO LEGISLATIVE ADVOCATES

Since the 1950s, the CACVSO has been active at the State Capitol, advocating on behalf of California veterans, active duty servicemembers, and their families. The CACVSO first retained a professional legislative advocate in 1985, when it hired lobbyist and former WWII pilot Art Krause, who served in this position until 2000. From 2000 to 2017, lobbyist and Vietnam veteran Pete Conaty represented the association. Upon Mr. Conaty's retirement, Iraq and Afghanistan veteran and lobbyist Seth Reeb, along with lobbyist Dana Nichol, transferred from Pete Conaty and Associates to Reeb Government Relations (RGR), which assumed advocacy duties for the CACVSO and provided years of institutional knowledge and familiarization with the needs of veterans.



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

RGR was established in January 2005 by Bob Reeb to assist clients with policy analysis, issues management, and legislative and regulatory advocacy regarding water resources. Bob has 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 at 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 issues. Transferring to RGR in 2018, he assumed the lead role representing the CACVSO.



### **Dana Nichol**

Dana transferred to RGR in 2018 to continue working on 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. Dana also serves as the Annual Report Editor.



### **Raquel Ayala Vargas, Esq.**

Raquel joined RGR as a legislative assistant in 2009, having previously gained valuable experience as a legislative intern in the State Senate. She became a lobbyist for RGR in 2018, following graduation from Lincoln Law School. She is a member of the California State Bar, and is bilingual — fluent in speaking and writing in Spanish.

# VETERAN DRIVER LICENSE AND ID AVAILABLE

Have you served in the U.S. military? You may qualify to proudly display veteran on your California driver license or identification card. It's easy as 1, 2, 3!

- 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 call (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.



[www.calvet.ca.gov](http://www.calvet.ca.gov)

**CALVET**  
California Department  
of Veterans Affairs



## HOW ONE SMALL BILL IS IMPROVING THE LIVES OF THOUSANDS OF VETERANS AND 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 programs and 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 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, 219,850 veterans visited CVSOs to get the "Veteran" designation on their driver's license between November 2015 and January 1, 2021. During these visits, 85,918 veterans filed claims with the federal VA and more than 35,384 veterans are now receiving annualized VA payments totaling \$202,499,570. This does not include over \$117 million in retroactive payments and \$2.06 million in miscellaneous payments.

Since the majority of this benefit is annualized monthly payments made directly to the 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 direct veterans to their CVSOs, they would not discover the untapped financial and healthcare 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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## **Bergmann & Moore is honored to partner with CACVSO.**

We represent Veterans and families, **at no charge**, on disability benefit appeals from the Board of Veterans Appeals to the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims.



**For a free evaluation of any BVA decision, please email the Board decision to [CACVSO@VetLawyers.com](mailto:CACVSO@VetLawyers.com) or fax it to 301-986-0845.**

### **Free Representation for California Veterans Before the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims**

Sometimes the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) makes mistakes when deciding disability benefit claims for veterans and families. Since 2017, County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) can reach out to the national law firm Bergmann & Moore (B&M) for a free Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA) decision review plus no-cost representation for the veteran before the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (Court).

The CACVSO/B&M agreement of no-cost representation has been overwhelmingly positive. During the past five years, B&M represented 57 California veterans and widows, and B&M was successful in all of them. The screening process for Board/VA decision reviews is easy and starts when a CVSO emails the BVA denial to [CACVSO@VetLawyers.com](mailto:CACVSO@VetLawyers.com).

Time is a critical factor when appealing from the BVA to the Court, as a veteran has only 120 days (from the date of the BVA decision) to appeal to the Court. When a CVSO and veteran receive a denial from the BVA, they may obtain a quality review by emailing the Board's denial to [CACVSO@VetLawyers.com](mailto:CACVSO@VetLawyers.com). B&M quickly responds to the CVSO within 72 hours. If B&M believes VA made an error, then B&M offers the veteran no-cost representation.

Once the veteran's appeal is filed with the Court, the veteran receives regular updates from their assigned B&M attorney. The process is transparent, and anyone can visit the Court's website and view all of the case filings: <http://www.uscourts.cavc.gov/>. When the Court decides the case, usually in 9 to 12 months, B&M provides the veteran and the CVSO with a copy of the claim file plus details regarding the next steps. The Court will usually order/remand the appeal back to the VA to correct the identified errors.

"B&M is honored to assist California's CVSOs and veterans with free Board decision reviews and no-cost representation before the Court," said Paul Sullivan, Bergmann & Moore's Director of Veteran Outreach and a former CalVet Deputy Secretary. "In addition to litigation assistance for CVSOs, B&M attorneys were pleased to present three webinars with CalVet on the subject of toxic wound claims, including Agent Orange, Gulf War Illness, and Burn Pits. We look forward to many more years successfully advocating with CACVSO for our veterans and families," Sullivan added. Created in 2004, B&M is based near Washington, DC and is managed by former VA attorneys who are well versed in the process. Many of our employees are veterans and family members of veterans.



# CALIFORNIA STATE COMMANDERS VETERANS COUNCIL



## CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS

**WORKING TOGETHER ON BEHALF OF CALIFORNIA'S VETERANS FOR OVER 55 YEARS**



The California State Commanders Veterans Council serves as the collective voice for the state's major veterans service organizations. CSCVC supports veterans through advocacy efforts aimed at enhancing the rights, benefits, and well-being of California's 1.6 million veterans and their dependents.





**RECEIVE VETERAN BENEFIT  
INFORMATION SPECIFIC TO  
YOUR NEEDS!**

**REGISTER WITH MYCALVET TODAY!**

myCalVet provides veterans and their families the opportunity to create a customized profile which targets the benefits, resources, and services available in their community and throughout the state.

**[WWW.CALVET.CA.GOV](http://WWW.CALVET.CA.GOV)**

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