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VIETNAM VETERANS ASSOCIATION-CALIFORNIA STATE COUNCIL LEGISLATIVE ADVOCATE REPORT JANUARY 2024

California's legislative efforts in 2024 reflect a strong commitment to addressing a wide range of veterans' issues. The Legislature reconvened for 2024 on January 3, 2024, for the second year of the 2023-24 legislative session.

In 2023, Dr. Vito Imbacianni was Appointed by Governor Gavin Newsom as the chair of the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine, leaving the Cal vet Secretary to be filled. I am proud to announce it has officially been filled as of January 16, 2024, by Lindsey Sin, who was confirmed by the State legislature.

Priority Legislation 2024

AB 46-Ramos, the bill that sought to exempt military retirement pay and SBP from the state income tax, was held under submission to the Senate Appropriations Committee on September 1. Normally, this action is a de facto death sentence for a bill. However, in the case of AB 46, the Governor's Department of Finance (DOF) showed to the author that the bill idea had merit, but a way needs to be found to reduce the hit to the state's revenues. Assemblyman Ramos has committed to working in 2024 to find a solution in the budget process or some other way to alleviate DOF's concerns. AB 46 is not bound by the January 31 deadline since it passed its house of origin and is in the Senate. AMVETS is in support of AB 46.

Newly Appointed Cal Vet Secretary:

Lindsey Sin was appointed by Governor Newsom as Secretary of the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet). She was confirmed by the Legislature on January 16, 2024. This appointment marks a historic moment as Sin becomes the first woman to hold this prestigious position since Virginia Mae Days in 1975.

She enlisted in the U.S. Navy after high school and served from 1997 to 2005, achieving the rank of Petty Officer First Class with Naval Aviation and Naval Aircrew designations. During her service, she completed two flight tours in Rota, Spain, contributing to Operations Northern Watch, Southern Watch, Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom.

Proposition 1

The passage of SB 326 created Prop 1, which would issue \$6.380 billion in bonds alongside the statutory changes to the Mental Health Services Act. Proposition 1, set for the March 2024 ballot, is a critical measure directly impacting veterans. It aims to funnel more funds into housing and treatment for homeless residents, with a significant focus on those struggling with mental illness, a group that includes many veterans. Prop 1 is expected to bring new resources to California's most vulnerable veterans without redirecting funds from existing programs, ensuring an additive impact on the fight against veterans' homelessness. California veterans will be entitled to \$1.05 billion of the \$6.380 billion for permanent supportive housing for homeless veterans who have mental health or substance abuse disorders.

Budget Change Proposals

A Budget Change Proposal (BCP) is a formal request from state agencies or departments to change how they spend

money in the state budget. The process involves:

1. Agencies identify funding needs.
2. Requests are reviewed by the Governor.
3. Approved changes may be included in the Governor's budget proposal.
4. The Legislature reviews, negotiates, and approves the budget, including BCPs.
5. The Governor signs the budget into law.
6. Agencies implement the changes.

In summary, a Budget Change Proposal (BCP) is a formal request to change how money is allocated in the California state budget. The process involves multiple steps, including submission, review by the Governor's office, legislative review, negotiation, approval, and implementation. Veterans should be aware of this process and engage with their representatives to advocate for funding and programs that benefit them.

Currently CalVet has submitted a few Budget Change Proposals (BCP) that request funds from the budget. Highlighted below are two of those BCP:

BCP Strategic Realignment for The Barstow Veterans Home

One of the BCPs submitted by the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) for the fiscal year 2024-25 is a [strategic realignment for the Barstow Veterans Home](#). The BCP proposes to reduce the budgeted Domiciliary beds from 220 to 190, resulting in a savings of \$265,000 from the General Fund and the elimination of two positions. The rationale for this proposal is based on two factors: the recommendations from the Veterans Homes of California [2020 Master Plan](#) and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Master Plan, which was released in December 2019, assessed the current and future needs of California's veterans and provided a roadmap for improving the quality and efficiency of the Veterans Homes. The Master Plan recommended that CalVet combine its domiciliary care programs at the Barstow and Yountville Homes into one facility at Yountville, as the demand for this level of care is declining and the costs are increasing. The Master Plan also suggested that CalVet should explore alternative uses for the excess capacity at the Barstow Home, such as providing transitional housing or supportive services for homeless veterans.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which started in early 2020, worsened the challenges faced by the Barstow Home. The pandemic severely affected the occupancy and staffing levels at the Home, as well as the health and safety of the residents and employees. As of January 2021, Barstow Home had only 97 Domiciliary residents, compared to 154 in June 2019. The Home also had 35 vacant positions, mainly in nursing and direct care staff. The pandemic also caused 12 deaths and 68 infections among the residents and 75 infections among the staff.

Considering these circumstances, CalVet decided to initiate the strategic realignment of the Barstow Home sooner than planned. The BCP states that the proposed reduction of 30 Domiciliary beds will not affect the current residents, as they will be accommodated in the remaining 190 beds. The BCP also claims that the reduction will not compromise the quality of care or services provided to the residents, as the staffing ratios will remain adequate. The BCP further asserts that the savings generated by the reduction will be reinvested in the Home to address deferred maintenance issues and enhance infection control measures.

BCP Yountville Skilled Nursing Facility Support

Another BCP submitted by CalVet for the fiscal year 2024-25 is a request for a new [skilled nursing facility at the Veterans Home of California – Yountville](#). The BCP proposes to construct a 240-bed facility with an estimated cost of \$296 million, of which \$222 million is expected to be funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA). The BCP argues that the new facility is needed to replace the existing skilled nursing buildings at the Yountville Home, which are outdated and inadequate.

The [Yountville Home](#), which was established in 1884, is the oldest and largest Veterans Home in California, serving

over 700 veterans. The Home offers various levels of care, including independent living, residential care, intermediate care, skilled nursing, memory care, and hospice care. However, most of the buildings at the Home are over 50 years old and do not meet the current standards for design, accessibility, safety, and infection control. The BCP cites several deficiencies in the existing skilled nursing buildings, such as narrow hallways, shared bathrooms, poor ventilation, lack of natural light, and insufficient space for dining, recreation, and therapy.

The BCP proposes to construct a new skilled nursing facility that will provide improved amenities and services for the residents, such as private rooms, outdoor courtyards, and multipurpose rooms. The BCP also says that the new facility will increase the operational efficiency and staff productivity of the Home, as well as reduce the maintenance and utility costs. The BCP expects that the new facility will be completed by June 2027, subject to the approval of the USDVA grant and the availability of state matching funds.

These are some of the BCPs that CalVet has submitted for the fiscal year 2024-25. These BCPs are currently under review by the Governor's office, which will release its proposed budget in January 2022. The proposed budget will then be subject to legislative review, negotiation, and approval before it becomes effective on July 1, 2022.

Important upcoming legislative dates:

February

- Feb. 16: Last day for bills to be introduced.

March

- Mar. 21: Spring Recess begins.

April

- Apr. 1: Legislature reconvenes from Spring Recess.
- Apr. 26: Last day for policy committees to hear and report fiscal bills introduced in their house.
- May 3: Last day for policy committees to hear and report non-fiscal bills introduced in their house.
- May 10: Last day for policy committees to meet prior to May 28.
- May 17: Last day for fiscal committees to hear and report bills. Last day for fiscal committees to meet prior to May 28.

Legislative updates from the California State Assembly and Senate:

These bills and resolutions cover a wide range of topics related to veterans, mental health, taxation, education, and more.

To view all legislation text, amendments, analyses, votes, and status from 2000 to the present:

<https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billSearchClient.xhtml>

AB 46 (Ramos D): This bill, if enacted, would exclude retirement pay received by a taxpayer from the federal government for service in the uniformed services from gross income for taxable years beginning on or after January 1, 2024, and before January 1, 2034. It would also exclude annuity payments from the United States Department of Defense Survivor Benefit Plan for qualified taxpayers during the same period.

AB 941 (Waldron R): This bill proposes the establishment of a framework for psychedelic-assisted therapy and requires a study and recommendations by the California Health and Human Services Agency. If the framework is enacted, it would authorize the use of hallucinogenic or psychedelic substances for psychedelic-assisted therapy.

AB 1788 (Quirk-Silva D): This bill seeks to establish mental health multidisciplinary personnel teams in counties to identify, assess, and link justice-involved individuals diagnosed with mental illness to supportive services, both during their incarceration and upon release from county jail.

AB 1854 (Schiavo D): This bill aims to make changes to the process for deferring payments on certain obligations for members of the United States Army Reserve or the National Guard who are called to active duty.

AB 1882 (Villapudua D): This bill modifies the definition of "disabled veteran" for special license plates in the Vehicle Code to include veterans who cannot walk without the use of an assistant device or have other specified conditions.

AB 1884 (Ward D): This bill expands excused absences from school for pupils to include time spent with a member of their immediate family who is an active-duty member of the uniformed services, without specifying deployment to a combat zone.

AB 1899 (Cervantes D): This bill makes it a misdemeanor to charge or receive an unreasonable fee for preparing, aiding, or advising veterans in securing public social services, including veterans pension benefits. It also makes certain advertising related to veterans benefits a misdemeanor.

ACR 121 (Gallagher R): This resolution designates portions of State Highway Routes 20 and 99 in the City of Yuba City for inclusion in the National Purple Heart Trail.

ACR 126 (Patterson, Joe R): This resolution designates a portion of State Route 80 in the County of Placer as the Sergeant Nicole Gee, United States Marine Corps Memorial Highway.

SB 679 (Grove R): This bill makes technical, no substantive changes regarding assistance provided to veterans by state and local public agencies.

SB 726 (Archuleta D): This bill addresses property taxation and provides exemptions for disabled veteran homeowners.

SB 871 (Archuleta D): This bill makes changes related to homeowners' exemptions, veterans' exemptions, and disabled veterans' exemptions in property taxation.

SB 911 (Seyarto R): This bill proposes an exclusion from gross income for survivor benefits or payments under the federal Survivor Benefit Plan for taxable years beginning on or after January 1, 2025, and before January 1, 2030.

SB 916 (Seyarto R): This bill prohibits public postsecondary education institutions from charging tuition or fees for certain extended education courses for veterans who meet specific requirements.

SB 920 (Seyarto R): This bill establishes a California Purple Star School Designation Program to support military-connected pupils and their families' unique needs in public schools and recognizes schools that meet specific requirements.

SB 943 (Ochoa Bogh R): This bill addresses veterans' preference in civil service positions by allowing a waiver of the bachelor's degree requirement for certain veterans.

SCA 6 (Archuleta D): This constitutional amendment would allow a dwelling that receives veterans' exemptions to also receive homeowners' exemptions and authorizes the Legislature to exempt property eligible for veterans' exemptions.

SCR 11 (Nguyen R): This resolution declares August 1, 2023, as Gold Star Children's Day.

SCR 61 (Seyarto R): This resolution proclaims the week of September 4, 2023, through September 10, 2023, as Suicide Prevention Week in California.

SCR 98 (Umberg D): This resolution proclaims March 2024 as Traumatic Brain Injury Awareness Month.

SCR 103 (Nguyen R): This resolution proclaims June 19, 2024, as Veterans of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces Day.

Senate Military and Veterans Affairs:

The California Senate Military and Veterans Affairs Committee for the 2023-2024 session includes the following members:

- Senator Bob Archuleta (Chair)
- Senator Shannon Grove (Vice Chair)
- Senator Marie Alvarado-Gil
- Senator Caroline Menjivar
- Senator Thomas J. Umberg

The committee's office is located at 1020 N Street, Room 251, Sacramento, CA 95814, and their phone number is (916) 651-1503.

Assembly Military and Veterans Affairs:

The California Assembly Military and Veterans Affairs Committee for the 2023-2024 session includes the following members:

- Assembly Member Pilar Schiavo, Chair (District 40)
- Assembly Member Laurie Davies, Vice Chair (District 74)
- Assembly Member Jacqui Irwin (District 42)
- Assembly Member Devon Mathis (District 33)
- Assembly Member Dawn Addis (District 30)
- Assembly Member Juan Alanis (District 22)
- Assembly Member David Alvarez (District 80)
- Assembly Member Tasha Boerner Horvath (District 77)
- Assembly Member Juan Carrillo (District 39)
- Assembly Member Avelino Valencia (District 68)
- Assembly Member Carlos Villapudua (District 13)

The committee's office is located at 1020 N Street, Room 389, Sacramento, CA 95814. You can contact them via phone at (916) 319-3550

Legislative team:

I'm grateful for your keen interest in the Veterans Affairs Committee's initiatives. Your commitment to enhancing the lives of our veterans and their families does not go unnoticed. As the leading advocate at Reeb Government Relations, I'm here to ensure you're always in the loop and actively participating in our legislative efforts that impact the veteran community.

Should you wish to dive deeper into any specific piece of legislation, I encourage you to coordinate with your legislative team to connect with me to set up a Zoom or phone discussion. I'm more than willing to arrange a video conference to explore these matters further. It's an excellent opportunity for me to explain the legislative process in detail and, most importantly, to listen to veterans' firsthand accounts on how proposed laws could affect them. We do not always see unintended consequences.

Don't hesitate to contact me for any inquiries, feedback, or ideas you might have. I'm looking forward to our collaboration and hearing from you soon.

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