

VETERANS ASSISTANCE COMMISSION  
OF  
LAKE COUNTY, ILLINOIS

*Andrew C. Tangen, Superintendent*



# Annual Report

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Fiscal Year 2019

# Table of Contents

Introductory Letter.....	3
Glossary of Terms.....	4
Veterans Assistance Commission Delegates and Alternates 2019 .....	5-6
The Mission of the Veterans Assistance Commission of Lake County .....	7
Veterans Assistance .....	8
Advocacy .....	9-18
Partnerships .....	19
2020 Outlook .....	20
References.....	21



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December 23, 2019

The Honorable J.B. Pritzker  
Governor of Illinois  
State Capital Room 207  
Springfield, IL 62706-0001

Dear Governor Pritzker,

It is with great pleasure that I present you with the annual report of the Veterans Assistance Commission of Lake County, Illinois, pursuant to Chapter 330, Part 45, Section 8 of the Illinois Compiled Statutes.

As the foremost Veteran advocacy agency in Illinois' 2nd most Veteran populous county, we provide services in the following categories:

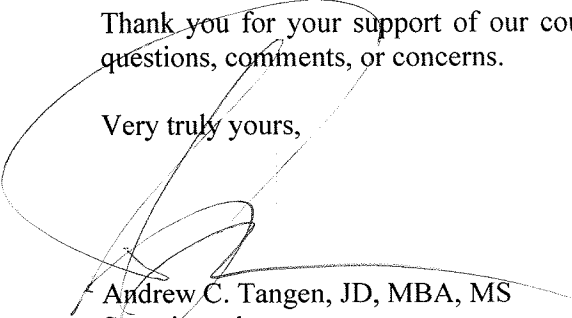
- 1) Veterans Assistance
- 2) Advocacy
- 3) Partnerships

In Fiscal Year 2019, the Commission was instrumental in securing an estimated \$4,871,169.07 in new benefits for Lake County Veterans, their dependents, and their survivors from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). This means the Commission has, in effect, more than quadrupled its budget in new monies coming into Lake County.

These new benefits represent an economic impact to the County of Lake of approximately \$24,355,845.33. That amount does not consider money that we helped our Veterans save by assisting them in accessing VA health care, home loan, or education benefits. Consequently, the Commission continues to be a significant and judicious governmental entity at the county level and continues to have an extremely positive impact on the economy of Lake County.

Thank you for your support of our county's Veterans. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions, comments, or concerns.

Very truly yours,



Andrew C. Tangen, JD, MBA, MS  
Superintendent

## Glossary of Terms

**Compensation:** See “Disability Compensation”

**Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC):** A tax-free monetary benefit paid to eligible survivors of military service members who died in the line of duty or eligible survivors of Veterans whose death resulted from a service-related injury or disease.

**Disability Compensation:** A tax-free monetary benefit paid to Veterans with disabilities that are the result of a disease or injury incurred in or aggravated during active military service.

**Functional Zero:** A goal that is reached when the number of Veterans experiencing homelessness within a community is less than the average number of Veterans being connected with permanent housing each month.

**Intent-to-File:** An application for Veterans and survivors who intend to file a claim for VA compensation, pension, or survivors’ benefits which preserves the effective date of future benefits while the claimant is gathering supporting documentation for their formal claim.

**Non-Service Connected Pension:** See “Pension”

**Pension:** A tax-free needs-based monetary benefit paid to wartime Veterans, who meet certain age or non-service-connected disability requirements.

**Pension Management Center:** A department at certain VA Regional Offices that is responsible for processing and adjudicating claims for pension, survivor’s pension, dependency and indemnity compensation, and burial benefits.

**Regional Office:** One of 56 VA offices located nationwide responsible for processing and adjudicating VA benefits which primarily includes disability compensation.

**Superintendent:** The executive powers of the Veterans Assistance Commission vest within this individual and that individual acts as the Chief Veterans Advocate for the Veterans of the County.

**Survivor’s Pension:** A tax-free needs-based monetary benefit payable to a low-income, un-remarried surviving spouse and/or unmarried child(ren) of a deceased wartime Veteran.

**VA Health Care:** A comprehensive medical benefits package available to qualifying Veterans which includes primary and specialty care at VA hospitals and clinics.

**Veterans Service Officer:** An individual who is accredited by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs who assists Veterans and their dependents in the filing of claims, and advocacy for, benefits with the VA.

**Work/Study Student:** A Veteran student who is using VA education benefits and is paid by the VA to do VA related work at no cost to the County.

## **Veterans Assistance Commission Delegates and Alternates 2018**

**President Nicholas G. Konz** – Mundelein American Legion Post 867  
**Vice-President Thomas Marciciak** – Lake Zurich American Legion Post 964  
**Chaplain Marie Honeywell** – Lake Zurich Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 110  
**Sergeant at Arms Donald Nickerson** – Samuel Schiera American Legion Post 1943  
**Executive Committee John Patterson** – Polish League of American Veterans Post 25  
**Executive Committee John DeReu** – Military Officers Association of America  
**Executive Committee Harry Swanson** – Libertyville American Legion Post 329  
**Executive Committee Paul Baumunk** – Lake Villa Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 4308  
**Delegate William Oerly** – Antioch American Legion Post 748  
**Alternate George Swenson** – Antioch American Legion Post 748  
**Delegate Andrew Schaffer** – Barrington American Legion Post 158  
**Alternate Fred Schaffer** – Barrington American Legion Post 158  
**Delegate John Reid** – Deerfield American Legion Post 738  
**Delegate Fergal Gallagher** – Grayslake American Legion Post 659  
**Delegate William Frangquist** – Gurnee American Legion Post 771  
**Alternate Peter Mockapetris** – Gurnee American Legion Post 771  
**Delegate Sheldon Konowitz** – Highland Park American Legion Post 145  
**Alternate Larry Sassorossi** – Highland Park American Legion Post 145  
**Delegate Duane Percy** – Homer Dahringer American Legion Post 281  
**Delegate David Bentley** – Lake Bluff American Legion Post 510  
**Alternate David Cimarrusti** – Lake Bluff American Legion Post 510  
**Delegate Robert Gabriel** – Lakes Region American Legion Post 703  
**Alternate Lizbeth Risely** – Lakes Region American Legion Post 703  
**Delegate Thomas Marciciak** – Lake Zurich American Legion Post 964  
**Alternate Richard Johnson** – Lake Zurich American Legion Post 964  
**Delegate Ernest Chan** – Libertyville American Legion Post 329  
**Alternate Harry Swanson** – Libertyville American Legion Post 329  
**Delegate Larry Crone** – McKinlock American Legion Post 264  
**Delegate James A. Nelson** – Mundelein American Legion Post 867  
**Alternate Larry Klauser** – Mundelein American Legion Post 867  
**Delegate Donald Nickerson** – Samuel Schiera American Legion Post 1943  
**Alternate John Patterson** – Samuel Schiera American Legion Post 1943  
**Delegate Lester Deanes** – Sharwin American Legion Post 1943  
**Delegate William Geary** – Wauconda American Legion Post 911  
**Alternate Donald Castella** – Wauconda American Legion Post 911  
**Delegate James Duncan** – Zion Benton American Legion Post 865  
**Delegate William Oerly** – Antioch Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 4551  
**Alternate Ken Sorenson** – Antioch Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 4551  
**Delegate David Kunz** – Highland Park Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 4737  
**Alternate Chris Thomas** – Highland Park Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 4737  
**Delegate Tom Schmit** – Highwood Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 4741  
**Delegate Barry Desfor** – Island Lake Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 2486  
**Alternate John Riendl** – Island Lake Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 2486  
**Delegate Marie Honeywell** – Lake Zurich Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 11020  
**Alternate Darrell Pebbles** – Lake Zurich Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 11020  
**Delegate Paul Baumunk** – Lake Villa Veterans of Foreign War Post 4308

**Alternate Thomas Skau** – Lake Villa Veterans of Foreign War Post 4308  
**Delegate George Gandara** – Libertyville Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 8741  
**Alternate Bernard J Voit** – Libertyville Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 8741  
**Delegate Randy Schenck** – Mundelein Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7191  
**Delegate Thomas Hilliard** – Ron Hill Memorial Veterans of Foreign War Post 2245  
**Delegate John Patterson** – Winthrop Harbor Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7448  
**Delegate John Shebenik** – American Veterans Post 35  
**Delegate Oliver Davidson** – Marine Corps League 801  
**Delegate Allan Ayers** – Marine Corps League 1395  
**Delegate John DeReu** – Military Officers Association of America  
**Alternate Eliseo Lee Lopez** – Military Officers Association of America  
**Delegate Frank Relmer** – Military Order of the Purple Heart Post 323  
**Delegate Christine Pawley** – Polish League of American Veterans Post 25  
**Delegate Art Dutkovic** – Reserve Officers Association of America Chapter 48  
**Alternate Paul Hettich** – Reserve Officers Association of America Chapter 48  
**Delegate Michael Zimmerman** – Jewish War Veterans North Shore Post 29  
**Alternate Martin Rockwell** - Jewish War Veterans North Shore Post 29  
**Delegate John Patterson** – Disabled American Veterans Chapter 16  
**Delegate Lonnie Hodge** – Operation Fetch  
**Delegate Levy Cordero** – Team Red, White, and Blue  
**Delegate Paul Hettich** – United States Army Reserve  
**Delegate Stan Villareal** – Vietnam Veterans of America

## **The Mission of the Veterans Assistance Commission of Lake County**

*To promote the welfare of honorably discharged Veterans of military service and their families through maximizing all possible benefits through effective and dynamic advocacy and by serving as a central service office for all Veterans residing in the County of Lake.*

This mission is accomplished through three key areas:

- 1) Veterans Assistance
- 2) Advocacy
- 3) Partnerships

The Staff of the Veterans Assistance Commission of Lake County is currently comprised of Superintendent Andrew C. Tangen; Assistant Superintendent Sherry J. Kruse; Senior Veteran Service Officer John L. Murray; Veteran Service Officers Alex Zapata and Michael Hiley; and Volunteers Allan Ayers, Douglas Wallace, and Michael Kozar.

For the Fiscal Year 2020 budget, the County Board authorized an additional Veteran Service Officer and an Administrative Assistant. The Commission looks forward to these additional staffers, who will help move the Commission into better alignment with the Commission Executive Board and Commissioners strategic vision of a twenty-first century County Veterans Services Office.

## **Veterans Assistance**

The Commission provides financial assistance, available to all honorably discharged Veterans of the County, including, but not limited to: rental and mortgage assistance; utility payments; aid to the medically indigent; assistance and emergency shelter to homeless Veterans, those Veterans in danger of becoming homeless, and those Veterans displaced by natural disasters; and, burial assistance of indigent Veterans.

This year, the Commission provided: six (6) indigent Veterans burial assistance; 254 nights of emergency housing, which included providing homeless Veterans with housing as they waited to be placed into the VA homeless, drug, PTSD, or other programs. Combined with other Veterans Financial Assistance, the Commission provided \$18,137.57 to needy and indigent Veterans of Lake County.

The Veterans Ambassador Program, started in Fiscal Year 2017, in partnership and collaboration with the Lake County Sheriff's Office, Providing Advocacy, Dignity, and Shelter (hereinafter "PADS") Lake County, the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center (hereinafter "Lovell FHCC"), the Midwest Veterans Closet, Medal of Honor Recipient Allen J. Lynch, the Lake County States Attorney's Office, and the Lake County Veterans and Family Services Foundation, as well as other Lake County Partners, such as Lake County Community Development, Built for Zero, and others, were recognized in June of 2019 for having achieved Functional Zero for Veterans Homelessness in Fiscal Year 2018.

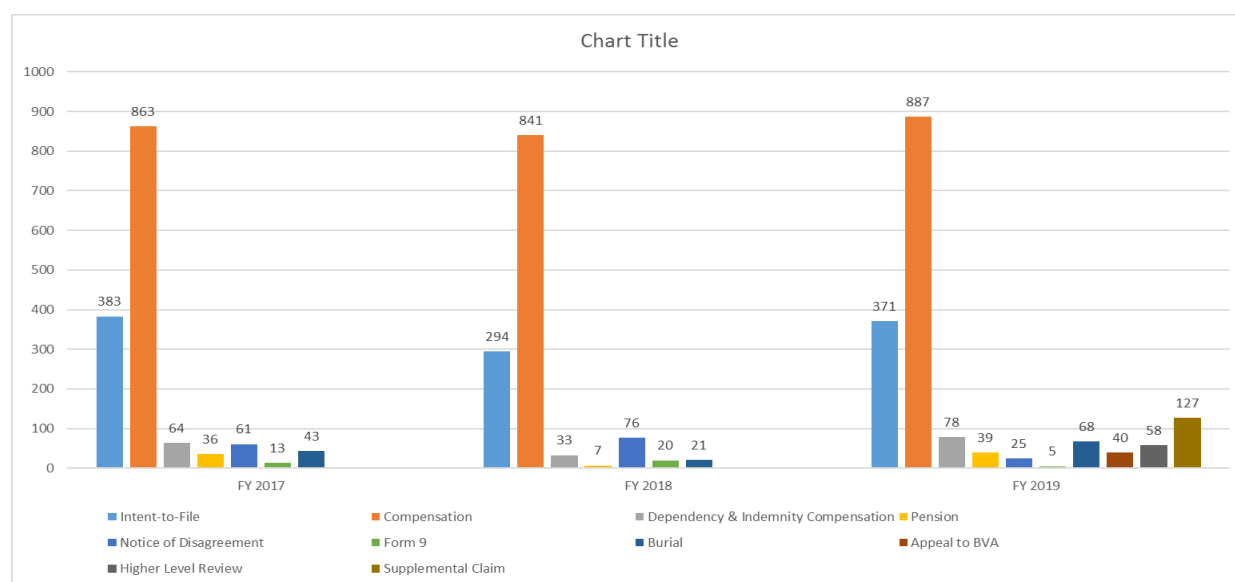
The Lake County ceremony for achieving Functional Zero for Veterans Homelessness was attended by notable dignitaries, such as Captain James A. Lovell, US Navy Retired, Director of the Lovell FHCC, Dr. Robert Buckley, Congressman Bradley Schneider, Chair of the Lake County Board Sandy Hart, other County Board Members, and many more community leaders. The work accomplished through the efforts of these Community Partners, and the ceremony was featured on the History Channel, alongside other communities across the Nation that have achieved Functional Zero in the fight to end Veterans Homelessness.



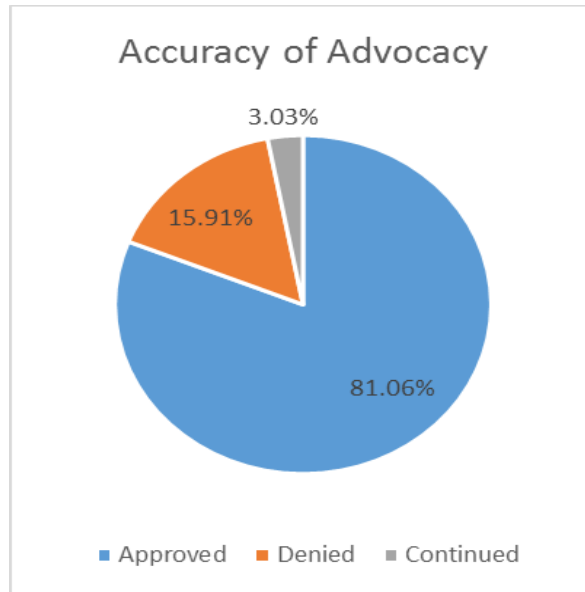
# Advocacy

## 1. Advocating at the Federal Agency Level

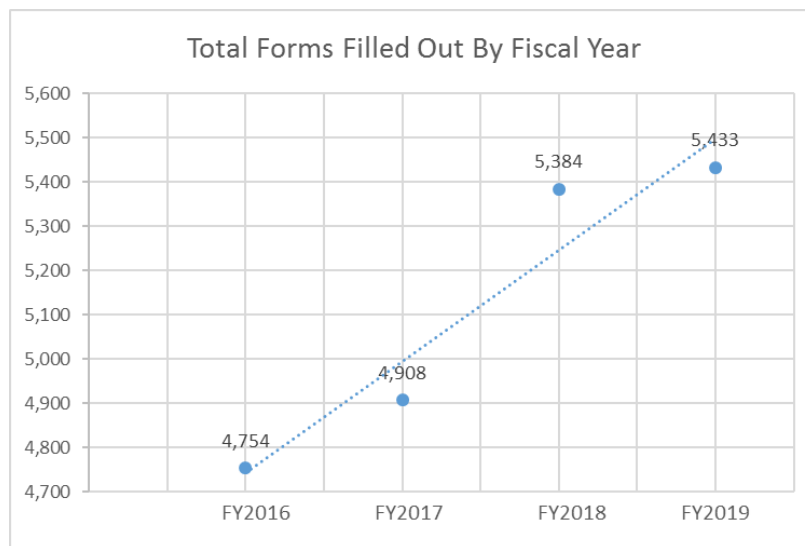
Advocating on behalf of Veterans involves assisting in the filing of claims for compensation, pension, school, and insurance, to local, state and federal agencies that includes the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Social Security Administration, adjudicating appeals for Veterans denied by representing those Veterans at the Board of Veterans Appeals, the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, and the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit.



FY2019 saw the implementation of the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017 (Pub L. 115-55), which drastically changed how Appeals and Requests to Reopen previously denied claims are processed. The Traditional, or Legacy Appeals process still applies to all claims denied prior to February 19, 2019, but by the end of 2022, the VA expects that all legacy appeals will have been decided and completed. This new appeals process gives Veterans and their advocates the option to appeal a denied claim through the submission of additional evidence (Supplemental Claim), review by a Senior VA Benefits Specialist based on the evidence of record (Higher Level Review), or direct review by the Board of Veterans Appeals. Out of all claims filed and decided, either on appeal (which is covered below) or initial claims decided, the Commission saw an 81.06% effective rate of claims appealed.

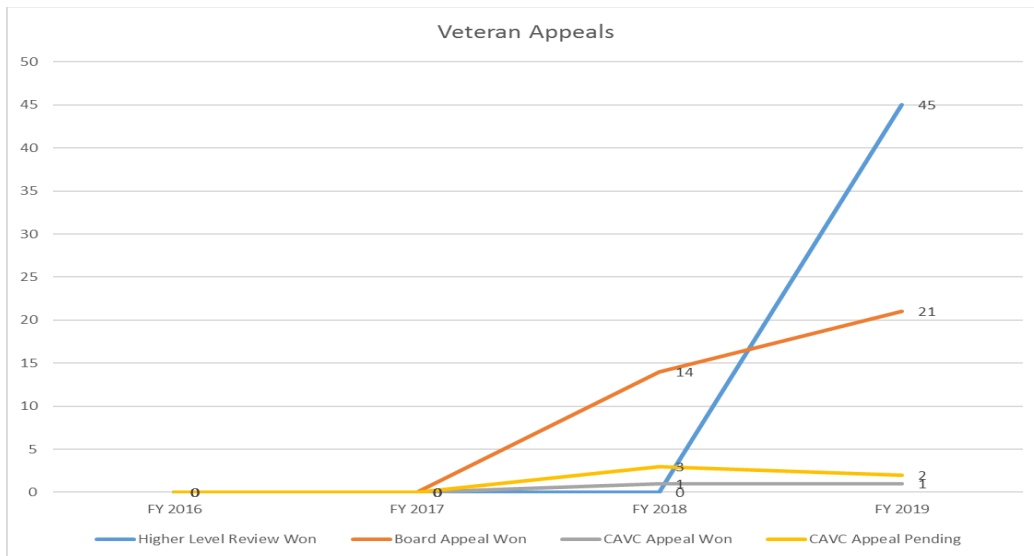


This represents a 10 percent effectiveness increase over FY2018, primarily due to additional training, research, and staff competencies, which have steadily increased over the previous three (3) Fiscal Years.



With the continual change and improvement in the way VA processes claims, the advocacy on claims and appeals the Commission staff completed represent a 23.9% increase over FY2018 in advocacy workload. Further, as a byproduct of the increased number of claims, appeals forms, and briefs in support of appeals filed, additional forms to support the claims and appeals increased. The number of forms completed is a solid production measure as claims or appeals filed may only be represented by one form,

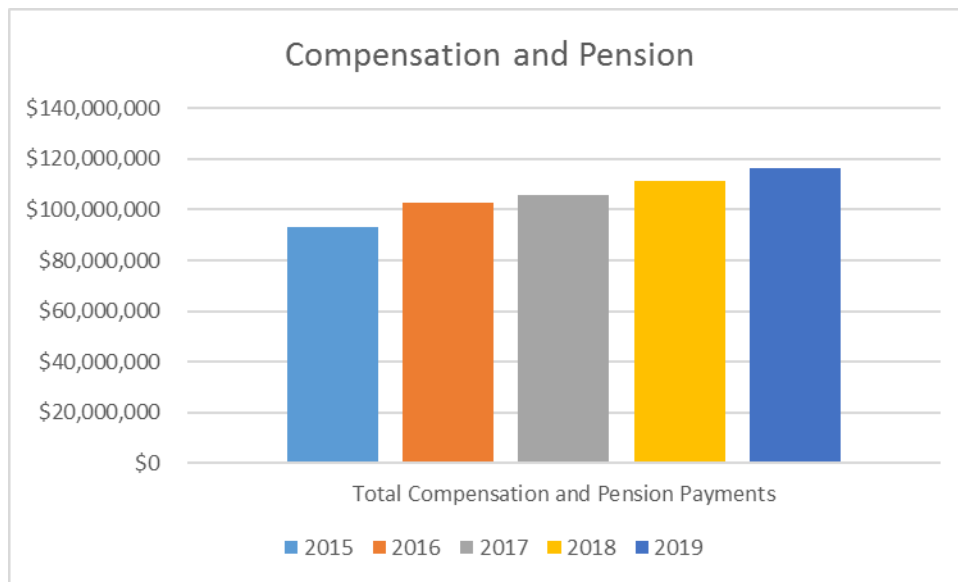
whereas evidence, supporting documentation, and additional forms (such as forms for dependency or release of information authorization) show a fuller picture of workload.



Further, the Commission staff continue to represent Veterans during all stages of appeals with numerous cases still pending before both the Board of Veterans Appeals and the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. The Commission staff has seen much success and quicker resolution to wrongly denied claims at the VA through the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017 (hereinafter “AMA”). The changes the AMA has brought have allowed for resolution to issues missed by VA Decision Makers that used to take upwards of five (5) to seven (7) years to see resolution at the Board of Veterans Appeals. Now, Veteran Service Officers (hereinafter “VSO”) are able to discuss the errors with high-level VA employees in order to point out errors of law or mistakes in fact, with resolution and correction coming as soon as 125 days.

As covered in the Commission’s Fiscal Year 2018 report to your predecessor, the Board of Veterans Appeals reverses or remands approximately 74% of the cases it hears, due to these same errors or omissions. This new system has allowed for quicker resolution of simple errors, thus saving valuable time and resources of both VSO’s, adjudicators at the VA, and Veterans Law Judges time and docket space for more complicated cases dealing with a myriad of issues in both law and fact.

An example of such complicated advocacy work was a case decided in January of 2019 at the Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit. That case, *Procopio v. Wilkie*, 913 F.3d 1371 (Fed. Cir. 2019)<sup>1</sup> dealt with Blue Water Vietnam Veterans who have long argued their exposure to Herbicide Agents, such as Agent Orange, during their service in Vietnam. This was followed by Congress passing, and the President signing into Law, the Blue Water Navy Veterans Act of 2019 (Pub L. 116-23). Having faster processing times for cases of this magnitude further assists Veterans of all eras by refining existing VA Law and dispatching misinterpreted VA Regulations.



Advocacy for VA benefits continues to be the primary focus of Commission staff. As indicated in the Introductory Letter, the Commission was instrumental in securing an estimated \$4,871,169.07 in new benefits paid by the Federal Government to Lake County Veterans, their dependents, and their survivors. Total VA Compensation and Pensions Payments for FY2019 for Lake County is expected to be approximately \$116,588,445.07.<sup>2</sup> This represents a return to the community of \$216.58 for every dollar of

<sup>1</sup> The Commission did not play a role in arguing this case at the Federal Circuit, but many Veterans who live in Lake County, due to the presence of US Naval Station Great Lakes, are affected by the rulings and subsequent VA action, with the Commission expecting to have an increased workload in FY2020 because of that. We cite here, only for reference to the importance of vigorous and competent advocacy needed at all levels, but especially the County Level.

<sup>2</sup> Further, when the economic theory of the Multiplier Effect is applied to this sum, with a conservative estimate of the Marginal Propensity to Consume of 80% and the Marginal Propensity to Save of 20%, this retroactive payment has a cumulative effect on the economy of Lake County of \$582,942,225.35. Veterans of Lake County are continuing to have an extremely positive impact on the economy of Lake County. In addition, these monies represent a positive

Property Tax Revenue received by the Commission. That amount does not consider money that we helped our Veterans save by assisting them in accessing VA health care, home loan, or education benefits. Consequently, the Commission continues to be a significant and judicious governmental entity at the county level.

However, this continues to barely scratch the surface as to what could potentially be available to the Veterans of Lake County. The Veterans of Lake County currently receiving compensation or pension represents 16.9% of Lake County Veterans and is 9.1% below the National average. Illinois currently ranks 52nd in per capita compensation and pension, behind every State, Guam, and Puerto Rico. As these statistics demonstrate, Lake County has been grossly underservicing its Veterans for years. We do not believe that the VACLC is the end-all solution to correcting this discrepancy; however, other Veteran Service Organizations are similarly short-staffed. What results is a lack of available services to our Veterans. This causes many Veterans to give up on filing for services that they very well may be eligible to.

If the Veterans of Lake County were to be at the National Average of 26%, it is estimated that the Veterans of Lake County would be in receipt of \$148,675,188 in compensation and pension annually. If the Veterans of Lake County were compensated at the Post 9/11 National Average of 41%, it is estimated the Veterans of Lake County would be in receipt of approximately \$223,012,782.<sup>3</sup> The proposition that Lake County could be at 41% is not an incorrect proposition as Lake County is home to the US Naval Station Great Lakes, Military Entrance and Processing Command, and many other tenant and other Service Component Elements, of which many Service Members leave Active Duty each Fiscal Year, and choose to remain in Lake County upon discharge. These Service Members are all Post 9/11 Veterans, many of whom have deployed multiple times during the 18 years of War to Iraq, Afghanistan, and many other locations throughout the World in support of the Global War on Terrorism.

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funding source for the Lake County Government, which is different than the funding stream of Property Taxes, as this money is spent on gasoline, entertainment, and other taxable sources within Lake County that can be applied to other Lake County Government Services and needed projects, such as Road Improvement.

<sup>3</sup> This figure would actually bring Lake County, Illinois closer to the monies received by similar counties across the United States with similar Veterans Populations.

## **2. Advocating For Veterans With Federal Congressional Representatives and Staffers**

The Commission continued its work with the three Congressional District Representatives and their staffers. The continued working relationship the Commission has with Congressman Brad Schneider of the 10<sup>th</sup> Congressional District saw increased collaboration across numerous key pieces of legislation the Congressman sponsored, as well as assisting his staff with constituency issues and outreach events for Veterans and their spouses. Fiscal Year 2019 saw numerous events recognizing Vietnam Veterans for their service; partnering to honor Veterans at several events, to include Memorial Day and Veterans Day<sup>4</sup>; and, working with the Congressman's staff on advocating for Veterans for wrongly denied claims, Military Retirement issues, and others. Similarly, the Commission continued its close working relationships with Senators Durban and Duckworth's staffers.

Fiscal Year 2019 saw the beginnings of a similarly close working relationship with Congresswoman Underwood and Congressman Casten's offices. Their staff's willingness to assist Veterans and their spouses with the various issues faced by our Veterans as well as pass on recommendations on specific legislation developed shows an incredible opportunity for closer collaboration in Fiscal Year 2020.

## **3. Advocating for State Legislation with Illinois Senators and Representatives**

The Commission continued its close working relationship with the Illinois Senators and Representatives from both parties whose districts encompass Lake County. We continued to work with those who have been legislators for some time and built new relationships with the new legislators who joined this year. Having these relationships has benefited not only the Veterans of Lake County and their families, but also the Veterans of the State.

Many pieces of legislation signed into law this year began at the local level with meetings between all Commissions of the State and its legislators through various meetings and discussions on the importance and nuances needed to be contained in the diverse bills that were brought up for consideration.

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<sup>4</sup> The Veterans Day Celebration at College of Lake County, sponsored by Congressman Schneider, was the largest Veterans Event the Congressman, the Commission, and the College of Lake County has ever had.

#### **4. Advocating for Partnerships and Support for Veterans Issues with Illinois Association of County Officials.**

The Commission continued to work closely with Illinois Association of County Officials (hereinafter “IACO”). Specifically, the Commission holds a key role as one of the many delegates from County Organizations on the IACO Legislative Committee. As the Illinois Association of County Veterans Assistance Commissions (hereinafter “IACVAC”) delegate, the Commission is able to advocate in front of the various County Organizations that make up IACO, to explain the necessity for certain legislation that has been filed in either Illinois Chamber. Having the ability to explain to these partner organizations the reasoning behind the need for changes, as well as have these partners join with IACVAC in our support or opposition to specific legislative items continues to be a positive impact on the Veterans Community in the State of Illinois.

#### **5. Advocating for Veterans with Captain James A. Lovell Federal Healthcare Center**

The Commission continues to advocate for Veterans at the Lovell FHCC through serving on the Patient Advisory Counsel (hereinafter “PAC”), as well as partnering with several Lovell FHCC Departments to bring about needed services and programs for Veterans receiving care at Lovell FHCC.

Specifically, through the PAC, which is chaired by Major General James Mukoyama, US Army Retired, the Commission is able to bring issues, concerns, and successes of Lovell FHCC to the Director and Deputy Director and plan out steps and solutions. So far this year, the Commission and the partners which sit on the PAC were able to bring attention to and solve issues such as: implementation of care eligibility for mental health services for Veterans with Other than Honorable Discharges; policy changes in Lovell FHCC providing medical opinions for Veterans seeking service connection for injuries or diseases sustained while on active duty; implementation of the VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act of 2018 (MISSION Act; Pub L. 115-182); advocate for increased parking for dependents visiting Veterans in long-term care or on hospice; and, improved mental health care for Active Duty members.

Further, the Commission has continued its strong relationship with the Lovell FHCC Homeless and Mental Health departments. Specifically, the Commission and Homeless Walk-in and Counselling Center have continued to refine the Veterans Ambassador Program, started in FY 2017 in conjunction with the Lake County Sheriff's Office and other partners to ensure Lake County remains Functional Zero for Veterans Homelessness. In regards to the partnership the Commission has with the Mental Health department, the Commission worked on numerous joint endeavors during FY 2019 to ensure continuity of care for Veterans with Other than Honorable Discharges (borne from a change in VA policy nationally), Lovell FHCC Mental Health Summit on November 6, 2019, and other initiatives to improve services.

Finally, Lovell FHCC, the PAC, and the Commission discussed utilization rates of the hospital and improved outreach activities to reach Veterans in the County. Currently, Lake County has 11,846 unique patients utilizing the facility, with \$231,862,000 in Federal dollars spent on healthcare, which constitutes a 12 percent increase over Fiscal year 2018, but is still well below the utilization rate of similar sized Veteran Population Counties throughout the Nation.

## **6. Partnership with the Lake County Board**

Fiscal Year 2019 saw a marked and demonstrable improvement in the relationship between the Lake County Board and the Commission. Both new and current Board Members desired to better understand the issues facing Veterans, and the partnership with County Board Chair Sandy Hart allowed for many initiatives to begin. Chair Hart's leadership has allowed for much positive change between the Lake County Board and the Commission.

First, the Lake County Board partnered with the Commission to honor the Veterans of World War One with a dedication and resolution recognizing the end of that Great War and for Fiscal Year 2019 of Lake County to be devoted to the remembrance of the service and sacrifice of those Veterans on the Centennial of that War. Second, the Lake County Board partnered with both the Commission, State Legislators, and Congressman Schneider's office in recognizing and providing honors to several Veterans who passed away during Fiscal Year 2019, especially the long-serving Commander of Libertyville VFW Post 8741. Third, Lake County Board Members took a more active role in learning about Veterans issues,



meeting with constituent Veterans and Commission Staff to discuss the importance of Veterans issues and how increased services help not only the individual Veteran and their families, but also assist in providing more resources available to other citizens as these Veterans begin to receive medical and other treatment from the VA. Finally, the County Board partnered with the Commission in joining in our support for key pieces of legislation at both the State and Federal Level. Specifically, the County Board joined with the Commission in its support of House Bill 96, a Federal Bill that changes the Federal Law in relation to Dental Treatment for Veterans by sending a resolution to the entire State of Illinois Congressional Delegation asking for their sponsorship and support in this very important bill. This bill, if passed by the House and Senate and signed into law, would change the current law, which only allows Veterans either service connected for tooth injuries sustained in service, or compensated at the 100% level, or paid at the 100% level due to Total Disability Individual Unemployability to receive dental care, to be more in line with how other medical benefits are provided to Veterans who receive care from the VA, and opening up dental services to more Veterans in need.

## **7. Writ of Mandamus Update**

The Commission filed a Writ of Mandamus against the previous County Board and Government of Lake County at the end of Fiscal Year 2018, due primarily with issues surrounding how the Lake County Government misapplied 330 ILCS 45, The Military Veterans Assistance Act (hereinafter “the Act”). The issues contained in the Writ of Mandamus have existed for decades between the Lake County Government and the Commission. Primarily, due to the sheer size of the Veterans Population of Lake County, the staffing for the Commission has been well below the required numbers when compared to similarly situated counties throughout the United States.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The Commission delineated in its Fiscal Year 2018 Report to the Governor the issues that had existed between the Commission and prior County Leadership and how the Commission attempted on numerous occasions, both during Fiscal Year 2018 and the decades prior, to negotiate with the County on improving services to the Veterans of Lake County and how the Commission was forced to eliminate programs during Fiscal Year 2018 in order to have the former County Administrator recommend to the previous County Board to increase the staff of the Commission.

Fiscal Year 2019 saw the Commission staff working through nearly 15,000 discovery documents provided by the County, which included nearly 10,000 Bates Stamped documents and the attachments to those documents. Further, other discovery process has taken place, to include both written and oral discovery, which has taken immense time to prepare for. In addition, the Commission has asked for Leave to Amend the Complaint in Mandamus due to numerous requests to the County Government over the last three (3) years for an accounting of the Commission's budget for specific line items and for Fund 208, the Fund the County places levied tax dollars levied under the Act, the County Code 55 ILCS 5/5-2006, and the Public Aid Code 305 ILCS 5/12-21.13. Briefs are being prepared by both sides and a hearing is scheduled for mid-January on whether the amendment for an Accounting will be granted.

Dispositive motions are due by the end of January, and trial is set for the end of March 2020. During this time, both the County Government and the Commission are in active settlement negotiations, hoping to resolve the issues of the case and bring about understanding between the parties as to the intent behind the Act. The Commission hopes to be able to move on from this period as expeditiously as possible and to begin the process of mending the divide that has existed between the Commission and the County Government for decades.

This realignment and change of course, away from division and towards closer collaboration, has already begun with new leadership in both the County Government and on the County Board, but much is still needed to be done. The Commission looks forward to the point wherein Lake County is nationally recognized as the template for how County Veterans Services should be conducted and to expand upon the positive momentum that has begun between the County Board and the Commission.

## Partnerships

As covered above, the Commission has continued its partnerships with both US Senate and Congressional offices and State Legislators in Lake County to ensure the best possible legislation is moved forward for Illinois Veterans. The Commission looks forward to continuing this tradition of partnerships with those newly elected.

Lake County Recorder of Deeds continued to be an active and integral partner of the Commission through offering assistance with record retention and updating, assisting the Commission with advertisement and mailers to Veterans of Lake County, and filming segments for the Recorder's television program with the Commission to showcase the vital work done by the Commission. Fiscal Year 2020 hopes to be an expansion on the already incredible partnership between these two entities.

The Commission continued its partnership with the Midwest Veterans Closet, continuing the much-needed service of providing clothing to Veterans and their families. The Commission hopes to be able to assist this vital organization more in Fiscal Year 2020 and beyond, especially if the Commission receives increased budget dollars in the future.

The Commission has worked hand in hand with the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, Lake County, on several events throughout the year, and the Commission looks forward to further collaboration for next year.

The Commission has continued a strong partnership with Prairie State Legal Services.

As mentioned above, the Commission has partnered with Lake County Community Development to develop and implement a tracking system and network in order to track reports, interactions, and probable locations of homeless and near homeless Veterans throughout the County, regardless of discharge.

The Commission continued to partner with the Lake County Sheriff's Office, PADS Lake County, The Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center (FHCC), the Midwest Veterans Closet, Medal of Honor Recipient Allen J. Lynch, the Lake County States Attorney's Office, and Lake County Veterans and Family Services through the "Veteran Ambassador Program" and will continue to work with these organizations to maintain Functional Zero and ensure no Veteran is left behind.

The Commission continued its partnership with the Allen J. Lynch Medal of Honor Veteran's Assistance Foundation in order to further provide assistance to those Veterans in critical need.

As a member of the Illinois Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (Department of Defense sponsored organization) the Commission assists Lake County Reservists and Guardsmen with re-employment problems and recognition of private companies and employers who go above and beyond in supporting Lake County Reservists and Guardsmen who have been activated.

Partnership with the Illinois Department of Employment Security has increased to not only provide constant assistance to Lake County Veterans with employment referrals, but also with holding joint Commission/IDES meetings with employers to discuss and train employers on Veteran issues and the value Veterans can bring to these companies. Both the Commission and IDES have brought the Lake County Jobs Center into the coordination efforts to ensure continuity for Veterans seeking employment.

## Outlook For 2020

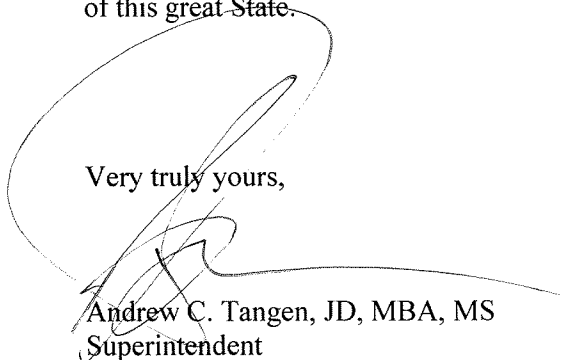
Fiscal Year 2019 began a new chapter in the Commission's history. Founded in 1926, the Commission celebrated its 93<sup>rd</sup> year by opening a state-of-the-art office in Gurnee, Illinois. This office is equipped with many green initiatives, as well as a Video Teleconferencing Suite (VTC), which will allow for Board of Veterans Appeals hearings to be conducted at the Commission office, rather than having to travel to either the VA Chicago or Milwaukee Regional Offices for Board Hearings. The Board of Veterans Appeals is currently conducting a pilot program and expects full implementation of Tele-Board Hearings to begin sometime in Fiscal Year 2020.

With the pending completion of the trial court level of the Writ of Mandamus set for early Fiscal Year 2020, the Commission looks forward to being able to turn its full attention from litigation for increased services, to implementing new services in support of our Veterans and Active Duty Members living in Lake County. The Commission has begun taking a more active role in Transition Assistance Program, Goals, Plans, Success Program (TGPS) at US Naval Station Great Lakes. TGPS provides separating/retiring service members and their families with the skills, tools and self-confidence necessary to successfully re-enter into the civilian work force, pursue higher education or technical training or retire. It is an honor to be allowed to take a more active role in this Program and gives Commission staff the opportunity to advocate with these soon to be separating or retiring Service Members the importance, opportunities, and potential for remaining in Lake County after discharge.

As stated in Fiscal Year 2017 and 2018 Reports, increasing the staffing of the Commission, by adding additional employees in order to continue to provide prompt, effective, and accurate advocacy for the Veterans of Lake County who gave their all to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of Illinois, is still needed. Without these important advocates, Veterans will continue to be underserved and underrepresented.

The Commission further looks forward to continuing the growing relationship with the Lake County Government and County Board to find the best possible solution for the Veterans and the taxpayers of Lake County. Anything else would be to disregard the sentiment of President Lincoln and show disdain towards those men and women who have given their youth, their health, their bodies, and their minds for the citizens of this great State.

Very truly yours,



Andrew C. Tangen, JD, MBA, MS  
Superintendent

CC: Lake County Board  
VAC Lake County  
State Legislators  
Federal Legislators  
Veteran Service Organizations of Lake County

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