

VETERANS ASSISTANCE COMMISSION
OF
LAKE COUNTY, ILLINOIS

Andrew C. Tangen, Superintendent



Annual Report

Fiscal Year 2020

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December 15, 2020

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

In Fiscal Year 2020, the Commission was instrumental in securing an estimated \$9,237,795.63 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, brought in more than fourteen times its budget in new monies to Lake County.

These new benefits represent an economic impact to the County of Lake of approximately \$46,188,978.20. 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 2020

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 Paul Hettich – U.S. Army Reserve Ambassador - Illinois
Executive Committee Paul Baumunk – Lake Villa Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 4308
Executive Committee Allan Ayers – Marine Corps League 1395
Delegate Paul Hettich – 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 Paul Hettich – 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 David Christensen – 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) Financial Assistance
- 2) Advocacy
- 3) Partnerships

The Staff of the Veterans Assistance Commission of Lake County (hereinafter “the Commission”) 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, Shane McNerney, and Jilian “Summer” Padoan; and Administrative Assistant Suzette Pawluk. The COVID-19 Pandemic saw the Commission forced to move away from relying on our Vietnam Veteran Volunteers, all of whom are in high-risk categories. Allan Ayers, Douglas Wallace, and Michael Kozar were honored for their years of service to the Commission in a special ceremony in September. Their daily presence, humor, and assistance is most surely missed, though each of them continue to serve the Veterans community in different ways.

The Commission hired Shane McNerney and Summer Padoan as Veteran Service Offices and Suzette Pawluk as an Administrative Assistant in early February. These three new employees were welcome additions, especially given the pandemic.

Shane is a 4-year Veteran of the US Army and the Afghanistan War. While in the US Army, Shane was stationed at Ft. Wainwright Alaska. He deployed to Combat Outpost Baylough, Afghanistan in 2011, conducting counterinsurgency and counterterrorism missions in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Once he left the US Army, he attended Southern New Hampshire University, graduating with a Bachelors Degree in Business Operations. He is happily married, with one child.

Summer is an 8-year US Navy Veteran, 17-year Navy spouse, and mother of two boys. She deployed twice to the Persian Gulf in support of the Global War on Terrorism, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation Enduring Freedom, receiving three (3) Navy & Marine Corps Achievement Medals. During and after serving in the US Navy, she worked as an addictions therapist and behavior therapist for special needs children. She earned her Undergraduate Degree at Northeastern Illinois University with a major in Psychology and minor in Human Resource Development. Summer's knowledge and experience working with Veterans in mental health is an asset in assisting the Veterans of Lake County receive the compensation benefits and health care they need and deserve.

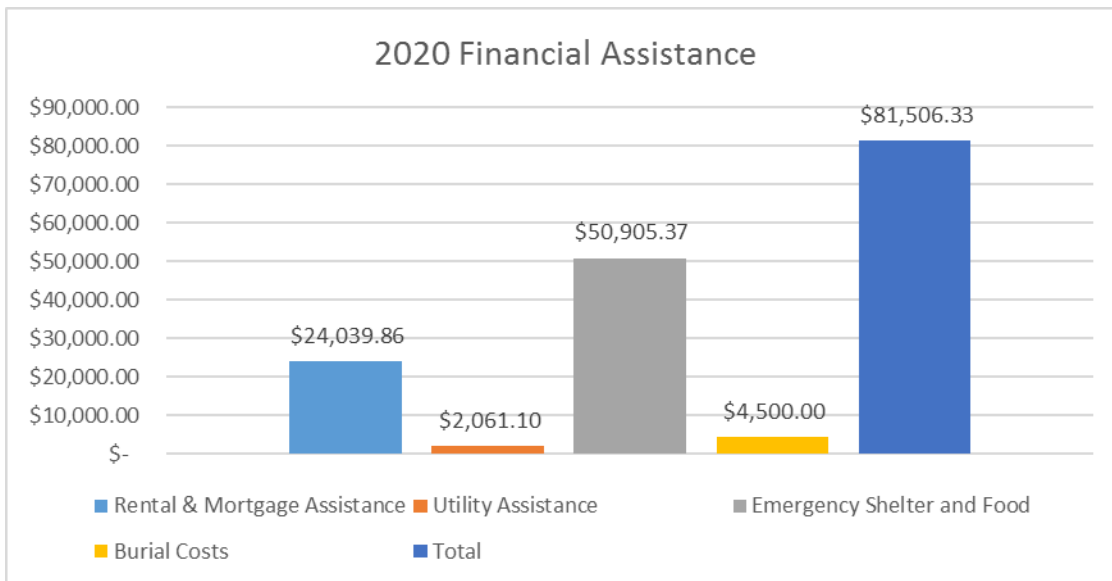
Suzette is a certified paralegal who graduated from Western Illinois University who has vast experience in the law firm, business, and corporate realm. She utilizes this experience daily in assisting Veterans. She is married to Mike Pawluk, a Veteran of the US Army Military Police, whom she met in college and has been married to for 27 years. They have one son.

These new staffers are welcomed additions and were absolutely necessary this year, especially due to the vast amount of work that the Commission was able to accomplish this year. Not only have they helped move the Commission into better alignment with the Commission Executive Board and Commissioners strategic vision of a Twenty-First Century County Veterans Services Office, they were essential in transforming the office into one that could continue to operate and advocate for Veterans, a Global Pandemic and lockdowns notwithstanding.

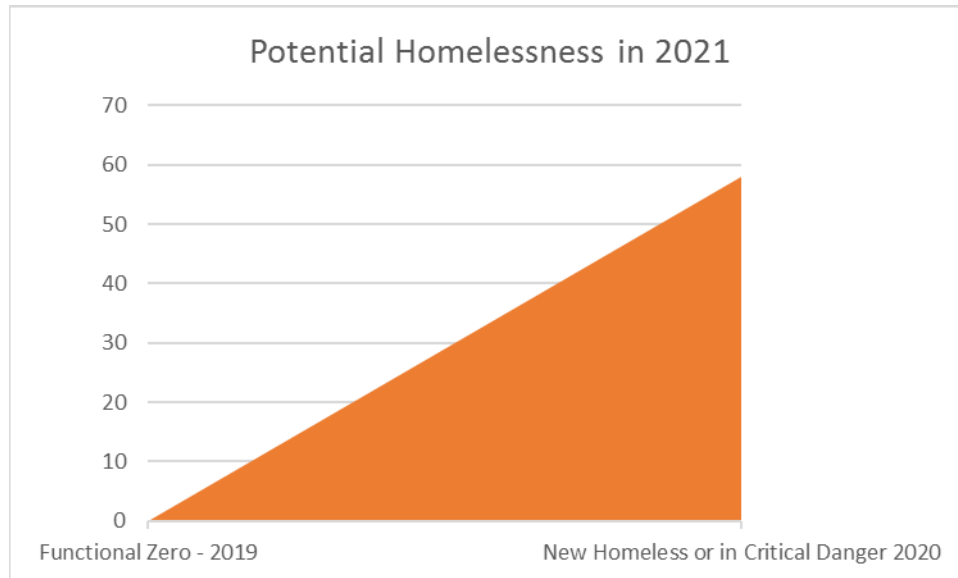
The Staff of the Commission molded with these new additions and we were able to create new policies and procedures, redesign the business model of service to ensure functionality in an isolated setting, function both remotely and in the Commission office when required, and increase the ways the Commission and its partners advocate for the Veterans of Lake County and Illinois, ensuring mission completion in troubled and difficult times.

Financial 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 \$81,506.15 in financial assistance, representing: \$24,039.86 in rental and mortgage assistance; \$2,061.10 in utility assistance; \$50,905.37 in emergency shelter and meals to indigent Veterans and their families, representing just under one-thousand (1,000) cumulative nights of hotel stays; and \$4,500 in burial costs of five (5) indigent Veterans. This represents a 77 percent increase in financial assistance provided over 2019 and a 74 percent increase in emergency shelter provided; however, this will be dwarfed next year once the moratorium on evictions ceases January 1, 2021. We currently have fifty-eight (58) Veterans who are in critical danger of becoming homeless in Lake County, at a minimum. These 58 are the ones who have reached out to the Commission for help. Many more remain silent.



The COVID-19 Pandemic has impacted the Veterans Community in a very negative way. Based on the trendlines that we are seeing, and briefly outlined above, Lake County is no longer functional zero for Veterans Homelessness. Unfortunately, the Pandemic hit everywhere and in a community already known for being at increased risk for negative outcomes, the Pandemic disproportionately impacted the Veterans Community. The nights of emergency housing alone show an increase in the amount of Veterans without secured and permanent shelter that only began after the Pandemic hit Lake County. The 74 percent increase over Fiscal Year 2019 in emergency housing provided gives one of many negative trendlines, reversing the successes over the last three years of the Commission, the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center (hereinafter “Lovell FHCC”), Lake County Community Development, Built for Zero, and all the other hard work of our many partner organizations. Luckily, we already have programs in place and can start these programs up with our partners in order to combat homelessness in the Veterans community, such as the very successful Veterans Ambassador Program.

We are also forecasting for Fiscal Year 2021 a massive increase in rental, mortgage, and utility assistance. The moratorium on evictions that has been in place for the majority of the year

has lessened the burden on our office in regards to financial assistance requests; however, beginning November 1, we began seeing a flurry of requests for financial assistance, over 80 requests in one month alone. Luckily, these requests came in while CARES ACT Funds were still available, but if the trendline continues in the direction it is presently indicating, the Commission will be inundated with requests for rental, mortgage, and utilities assistance for at a minimum six (6) months, starting January 1, 2021. This date coincides with both CARES ACT Funds expiring and the moratorium on evictions expiring. The Commission is well prepared for this eventuality, having taken much time during the preceding Fiscal Year to shore up policies and procedures, as well as implementing training on new staff and volunteers at local Veteran Service Organization Posts on financial assistance procedures to lessen the burden and staff time on applications for financial assistance.

Fiscal Year 2020 showed a dramatic increase in financial assistance over Fiscal Year 2019. This increase dealt primarily with emergency housing and not rental, mortgage, or utility assistance. As mentioned above, the trendlines are falling into negative rather than positive, with barely scratching the surface on all other types of financial assistance requests. Entering Fiscal Year 2021 in our current position will produce a dire situation in Lake County. The emergency housing requests show no signs of letting up going into next year, which means more Veterans and family members will fall into homelessness. With no CARES ACT Funds remaining next year and with no public aid from the State, the Commission has begun devising plans and policies, along with memorandums of agreement with partner entities and non-for profits to assist in getting through an especially difficult Fiscal Year 2021.

Monetary ability to assist Veterans and family members is not the only Veterans Assistance issue facing the County of Lake in Fiscal Year 2021. There will be, as has been seen throughout

Fiscal Year 2020, an increase in needed mental health, and other services, for both Veterans and their families during the difficult road ahead. The Commission continues to partner with entities that can assist in these areas to best assist in whatever need is uncovered within the Veterans community.

Unfortunately, years of micro-budgets for services to Veterans has produced a bare-minimum amount of ability to provide these services, which Lake County has only achieved this year. While the increase in staff before the Global Pandemic started allowed for a stopgap to be put in place, this stopgap only primarily dealt with the loss of healthcare, housing, employment, and food. The Commission is not equipped to provide the other social services that will necessarily begin in earnest after the lockdowns, and that which the Commission is required by law to provide. In order to combat these looming issues, the Commission will partner with specific entities next year to fill the gaps in needed services until additional programs can be added to the Commission's catalog of services.

Advocacy

1. Advocating at the Federal Agency Level

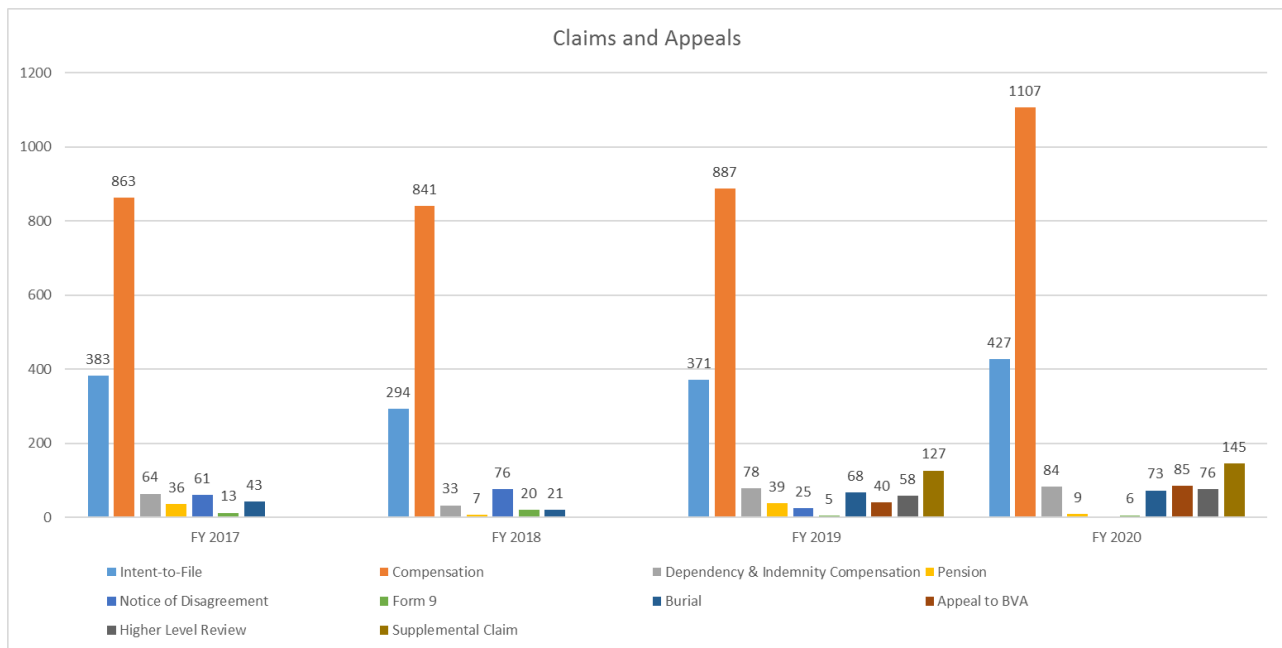
Advocating on behalf of Veterans involves assisting in the filing of claims for compensation, pension, school, and insurance, to local, state, and federal agencies that includes the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Social Security Administration, adjudicating appeals for Veterans denied by representing 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.

Fiscal Year 2020 saw a drastic increase in request for advocacy assistance over previous Fiscal Years. Luckily, the Commission hired additional staffers mere weeks before the outbreak of the Pandemic. Without these additions, the Commission would have been so inundated to be rendered ineffective. These new staff members molded perfectly with the Commission staff and Commissioners, embracing the training curricula established in Fiscal Year 2019. Further, National Associations of County Veteran Service Officers transitioned their accreditation classes to a remote learning aspect, which allowed these new staffers to become accredited during the pandemic, and National Association of Veterans Advocates began offering an increased catalog of remote training sessions. By the beginning of June, when the Pandemic really began to stress the economy and livelihoods the most, the Commission was able to meet the groundswell of need for dynamic advocacy. This was made even more important, especially to the Veterans Community in Lake County, because many other Veteran Service Organizations throughout the State, to include the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (hereinafter “IDVA”), closed offices and did not provide services for months. Many Veterans came to us in emergency situations with important dates in their claims and appeals about to expire, which would have negatively affected these Veterans and their benefits.

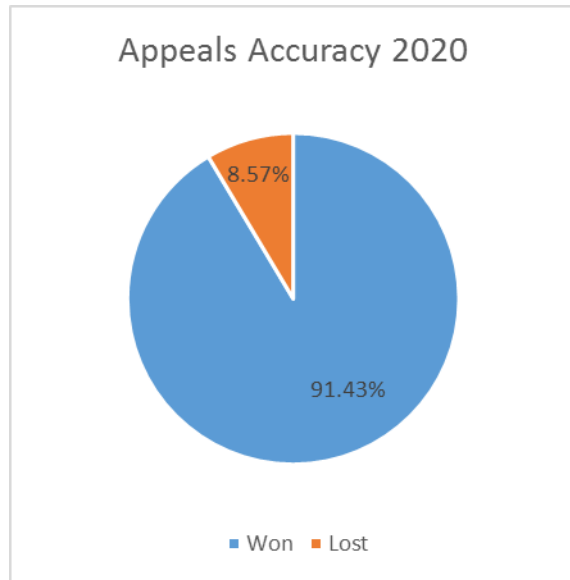
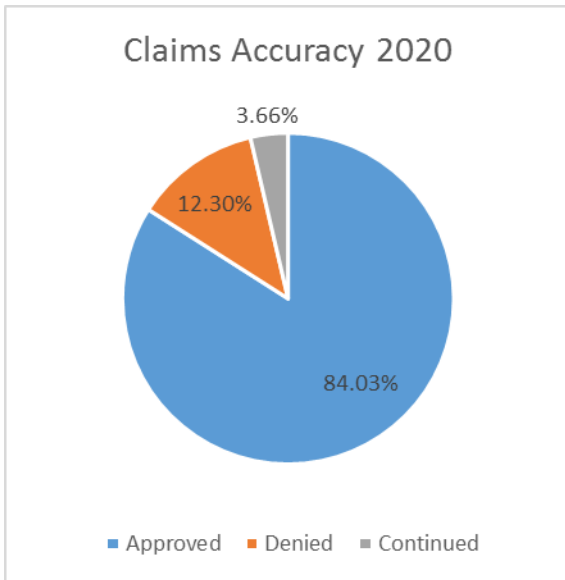
The Commission, conversely, remained open. Before the State of Illinois or the Federal Government called for lockdowns, on March 13, 2020, the Commission immediately: transitioned to remote meetings with Commissioners and the Executive Board; shifted in-person appointments to virtual and phone appointments; relied on new technologies such as video conferencing and other remote accessible

software to conduct hearings with Veteran Law Judges at the Board of Veterans Appeals, Appellate Judges and Clerks at the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims and the Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit; and, worked diligently in a socially distanced environment to ensure staff remained safe and healthy, and that no mission critical functions were degraded during the Pandemic and associated lockdowns.

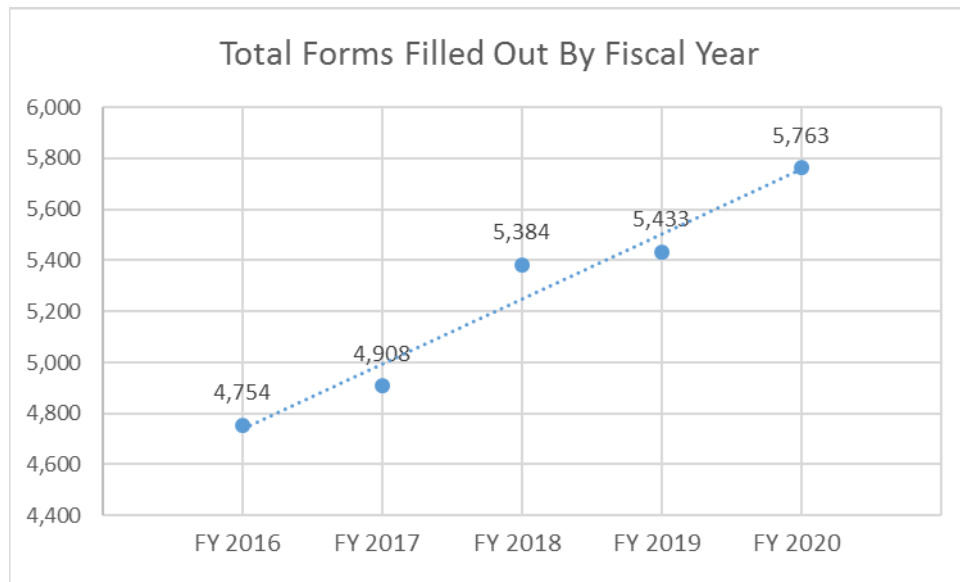
These steps were necessary, knowing that this virus had a disproportional impact on the elderly population around the world, prior to the outbreak occurring in the State. Considering that more than 50% of local veterans are age 65 or older, the Commission took these measures initially out of an abundance of caution. Once it became evident that the Pandemic would not release, the Commission continued its policies and procedures that had been implemented at the beginning of the pandemic.



Even with the challenges facing the Nation this year, the Commission continued fighting for Veterans. The advocacy work in front of the US Department of Veterans Affairs showed the largest increase with the Commission increasing 20 percent. This drastic increase showed how dire the need for assistance was in the Lake County Veterans Community and was most likely mirrored in every county in the State. Even with the drastic increase in claims, appeals, and other benefit applications filed, the Commission still saw an effective rate 85 percent of claims filed and a 91 percent effective rate of appeals. This compares to FY 2019 of 81.06 percent claims filed, 86 percent appeals.

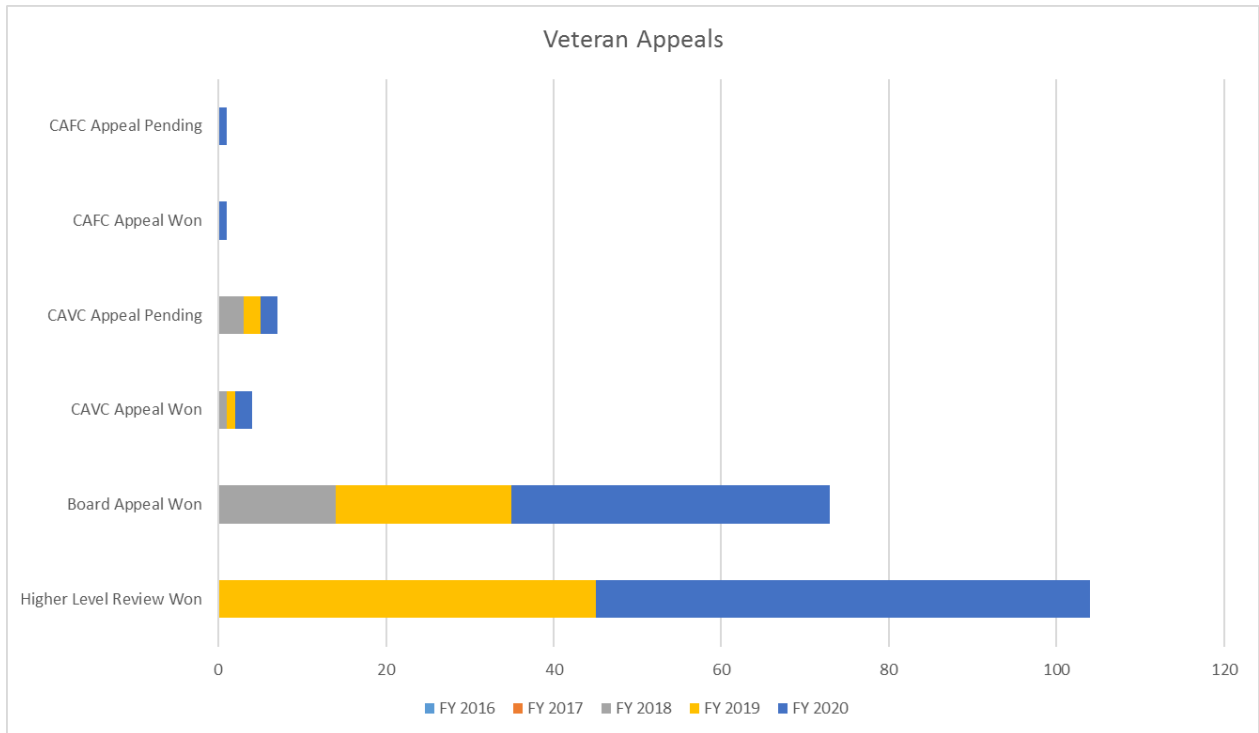


This represents a continued positive trend in effectiveness, year over year. Fiscal Year 2020 saw a 4 percent increase over Fiscal Year 2019, which had a 10 percent effectiveness increase over Fiscal Year 2018, primarily due to additional training, research, and staff competencies, which have steadily increased over the previous four (4) Fiscal Years.



Total forms completed continues to exponentially increase year over year. This is due to the Commission filing more complete claims and appeal documentation with Regional Offices and the Board of Veterans Appeals, in order to provide adjudicators with the data required to adjudicate claims effectively

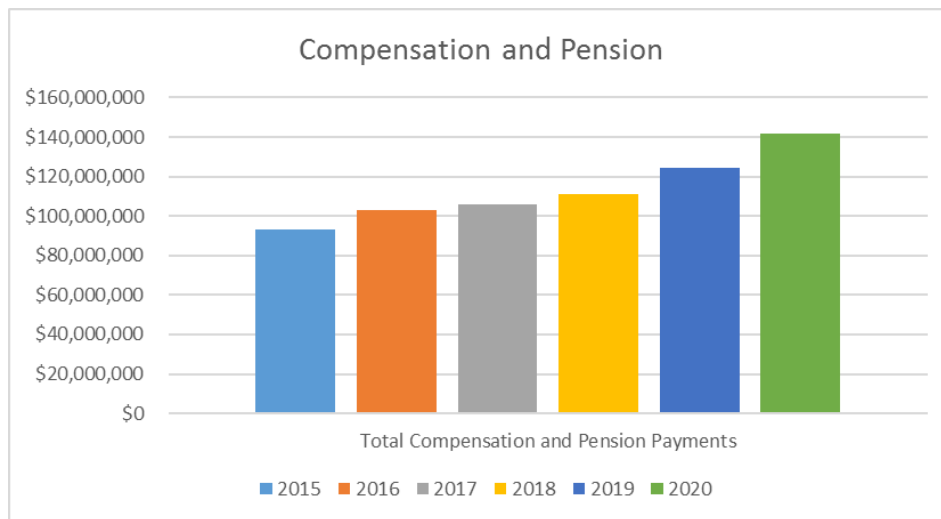
and correctly the first iteration. Further, as a byproduct of the increased number of claims, appeals forms, and briefs in support of appeals filed, additional forms to support the claims and appeals increased. The number of forms completed is a solid production measure as claims or appeals filed may 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. Further, the Commission also joined the National Organization of Veterans Advocates in *National Organization of Veterans' Advocates, Inc., et al. v. Secretary of Veterans Affairs*, No. 20-1321 at the Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, and *Stop NorthPoint, LLC, et al. v. City of Joliet, et al.* These cases will be covered more in depth below.

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 \$9,237,795.63 in new benefits paid by the Federal Government to Lake County Veterans, their dependents, and their survivors.

Total VA Compensation and Pensions Payments for FY2020 for Lake County is expected to be approximately \$141,654,215.47.¹ This represents a return to the community of \$223.21 for every dollar of 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 receive compensation or pension at a percentage rate 7.1 percent below the National average, which is approximately 2 percent better than Fiscal Year 2019. Illinois continues to rank 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. 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. With continued negative

¹ 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 \$708,271,077.35. 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 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.

trendlines looming as the Country, State, and County reel from the Pandemic, it is essential at this juncture of Fiscal Year 2021 and the planning for Fiscal Year 2022 for additional funds for needed services be provided to every County Veterans Assistance Commission in the State.

2. Advocating For Veterans at Federal Appellate Courts, State Courts, and Media

A. Federal Appellate Court Cases

The Commission worked throughout the summer and fall in several different instances. First, the Commission joined the National Organization of Veterans Advocates (hereinafter “NOVA”) in *National Organization of Veterans’ Advocates, Inc., et al. v. Secretary of Veterans Affairs*, No. 20-1321 (2020 WL 7218734) at the Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit. This case deals with whether Veterans and the entities that represent Veterans can request Judicial Review for agencies interpretive rules of the Federal Law and the Code of Federal Regulations. Specifically, this case focused on two of the provisions of the Department of Veterans Affairs (hereinafter “VA”) Adjudication Procedures Manual M21-1 (hereinafter “the Manual”). These two provisions were specific to the interpretation of Knee Joint Stability and Knee Replacements.

The case was heard at the Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit En Banc Panel, with its decision published on December 8, 2020. This decision dealt primarily with whether entities and organizations that represent Veterans could have standing to challenge Agency rules. The Court ruled in favor of NOVA, overruled the Court’s previous decisions in *Disabled American Veterans, et al v. Secretary of Veterans Affairs*, 234 F.3d 682 and *Gray v. Secretary of Veterans Affairs*, 875 F.3d 1102, invalidated and amended Federal Circuit Rule 15(f), and granted NOVA’s petition to review.

The Court will now review whether the VA’s actions in creating the Manual constitutes final agency action. The VA argued that the Manual was not a final agency action because the Manual is not binding on the VA as a whole, but rather on only front-line adjudicators and not Veterans Law Judges. NOVA argued, and the Court agreed, that these interpretive rules in the Manual have a practical effect on Veterans seeking benefits, due to all Veteran benefits claims being resolved at a Regional Office, where

these front-line adjudicators work. If there is an issue at the Regional Offices, as is continually shown in these reports, it takes years to appeal these wrongfully adjudicated claims. Much more work is left to be done in this case and the Commission looks forward to briefing this case in full once a final determination is rendered, which will most likely be included in next year's Governor's Report.

B. State Court Cases

The Commission continues the Writ of Mandamus action against the Lake County Government, with the case being transferred to the Second District Appellate Court for further processing. Much occurred over the past year in this case, which will be reviewed in full by the Court. The Commission looks forward to swift and just resolution to this case and will bring a full and complete synopsis in a follow-on Governor's Report.

The Commission also became party in the case *Stop NorthPoint, LLC, et al. v. City of Joliet, et al.*, joining Allen J. Lynch, MoH and his foundation, many other Veterans Assistance Commissions, Non-for Profits, Veterans Groups, and individual Veterans. This case revolves around the prevention of the proposed NorthPoint Development Industrial Park adjacent to Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery (hereinafter "ALNC"). This development would also require a bridge project to be constructed on Walter Strawn Drive crossing over State Highway IL-53, potentially damaging the sacred grounds and graves of Veterans interred there. The VA National Cemetery Administration, as well as the many organizations who have joined onto the lawsuit, are extremely concerned about this construction project, due to the over 58,000 Veterans who ALNC currently provides the final resting place and all of those Veterans and family members who will be interred there in the future.

Further, this project is estimated to increase trucking traffic to the area at approximately 3,000 to 5,000+ trucks per day (2 to 5 additional trucks per minute). This would negatively and adversely impact the visitor experience and ability of visitors to pay final respects and partake in peaceful reflection within the solemn grounds of the National Shrine to our Honored Dead, who lie in rest at ALNC. Like the other

cases the Commission is involved in, much more work is yet to be done. The Commission looks forward to providing you a full synopsis in next year's Governor's Report.

C. Media Engagement

The Commission was instrumental in bringing advocacy to important Veterans issues and celebrations by relying on media engagement during the Pandemic. Specifically, the Commission engaged with multiple entities in order to bring recognition to Veteran Charles Kelley on his 103rd birthday in May. Mr. Kelley survived the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 and continued to serve after the attack in numerous engagements in the Pacific Theatre, to include the Battle of Guadalcanal wherein his ship was sunk and he was adrift for many days waiting rescue. To Honor Mr. Kelley, the Commission organized a car parade in which Senator Duckworth's office, Congressman Schneider, Lake County Board Chair Sandy Hart, former Lake County States Attorney Michael Nerheim, former Lake County Coroner Howard Cooper, many other County Departments, local townships, and many other notable individuals participated.

Further the Commission partnered with Voice of the Nation (WVON) and WGN radio programs in discussing important Veteran issues, services available to Veterans, and partnering to disseminate important information for the Veteran community in the Chicagoland area. These programs were instrumental in leading to additional partnerships that have had a net positive increase in services to Veterans, both in the advocacy realm and in creating programs with private companies to provide exercise, respite, and nutritional programs based around healthy living.

The Commission further engaged with media during late November in disseminating information regarding the LaSalle Veterans Home COVID-19 outbreak. In early November, during a virtual meeting with the Kane County Veterans Assistance Commission, whilst reviewing notifications published on the IDVA website, it appeared to both the Kane and Lake Commissions that a serious issue was evolving at the LaSalle Veterans Home. Initial responses by IDVA from

requests submitted by both Commissions did not appear to convey details on what was needed or what was being done to contain the outbreak. The Commissions partnered with several non-for profits and Veterans Organizations to try and get information to decision-makers and calls for independent investigations.

The Illinois Association of County Veteran Assistance Commissions (hereinafter “IACVAC”) passed a resolution requesting the State of Illinois and lawmakers to specifically call for an independent investigation. Allen J. Lynch, MoH, MG James H. Mukoyama, and VFW State Commander Laurie Emmer joined the Commissions and IACVAC in this request as well. An independent investigation has begun, led by the Illinois Department of Human Services Inspector General. The Commission is hopeful that prompt attention may be called to this dire situation and corrective action may commence immediately. Further, The Commission partnered with other entities, to include other Veterans Assistance Commissions, in assisting the Veterans Assistance Commission of LaSalle County receiving donations, toiletries and other items required for the residents to LaSalle that are not provided by the Veterans Homes.

Following this realization of the Illinois Veterans Homes not providing these items, the Commission partnered with the Tawani Foundation, the Allen J. Lynch, MoH Foundation, and other entities to conduct a donation drive. Further, the Commission and its numerous partners began a donation drive to gather fund to be able to assist the numerous non-for profits throughout the State that are near and have relationship with the other homes throughout the State to ensure that needed toiletries and items are provided to our Veterans residing within the State Veterans Homes. This will be an ongoing issue that will continue into Fiscal Year 2021. The Commission looks forward to being able to answer this need to provide for these Veterans, many of whom are indigent or lacking a supportive family structure.

3. Advocating For Veterans With Federal Congressional Representatives and Staffers

The Commission continued its work with the three Congressional District Representatives and their staffers. The Commission continued its close working relationship with Senators Durban and Duckworth's staffers, Congressman Brad Schneider of the 10th Congressional District, Congresswoman Lauren Underwood of the 14th Congressional District, and Congressman Sean Casten of the 6th Congressional District. Unfortunately, the Pandemic prevented many of the activities and events the Commission and Members of Congress have enjoyed planning and participating, but it did not prevent the continued work on constituent issues, legislative items, and other concerns and issues Veterans are experiencing. The Commission looks forward to the end of the Pandemic when these activities can commence, and additional work and collaboration can continue.

4. 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. Having these relationships has benefited not only the Veterans of Lake County and their families, but also the Veterans of the State. Unfortunately, many of the events and legislative items the Commission had worked on with these Senators and Representatives were postponed due to the Pandemic. The Commission looks forward to being able to work on legislation and positive changes with the new Legislature.

5. 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.

6. Partnership with the Lake County Board and Government

The Commission partnered with the Lake County Board and Government in order to maximize County-Level response to the Pandemic, ensure accurate information was disseminated, and took part in the discussions regarding response and restoration for Lake County. This allowed the Commission to bring information and issues facing the Veterans Community to decisionmakers so that prompt response and correction to those issues was made. The election saw much change in the dynamic of the Board, and the Commission welcomes the new additions. The Commission is excited to build new relationships with these new Board Members and looks to continue the great relationships with current Board Members.

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.

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.

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 2021 hopes to be an expansion on the already incredible partnership between these two entities. The Commission further looks forward to the changes that will come with the Recorder of Deeds Office being absorbed by the County Clerk's Office. This will bring big changes, but changes that the Commission believes will not impact the great benefits and assistance the Recorder has provided for decades.

The Commission continued its partnership with TLS Veterans who provide needed transitional living, peer support, housing support, and employment assistance to Veterans throughout the Lake and McHenry County region. We look forward to continuing into 2021 and working with them in addressing the rising issues within the Veterans Community.

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 2021 and beyond, especially with the hopeful end to the Pandemic.

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. We look forward to closer collaboration next year in assisting Veterans and the potential increase in homelessness amongst the Veterans Population.

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 reestablish Functional Zero and ensure no Veteran is left behind.

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.

Outlook For 2021

Fiscal Year 2020 brought new challenges and incredible successes. For 94 years, the Commission has led the way in Lake County in assisting our Veterans and their family members. As Veterans, we are all aware about how difficult times can be, and we were able to rely on these experiences and knowledge to adapt and overcome the Pandemic that so devastated the World this past year. Our state-of-the-art office in Gurnee, Illinois, which opened last year, was perfectly suited and designed to meet the increased need that we experienced this year. No Veteran was left without aid during this time who contacted our office for assistance.

Next year, the Commission's Writ of Mandamus heads to the Second Appellate District for review. Unfortunately, the Commission's desire of turning this Fiscal Year to increasing services, is delayed until at least next Fiscal Year. The Commission, as covered above, is noticing very troubling and very dangerous trendlines going into next year. To combat this, the Commission is poised to reopen its office at the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Healthcare Center, and has partnered with many organizations in order to provide part of the services the Commission is statutorily mandated to provide, but as of yet lacks the funding.

As stated in each of the preceding Fiscal Year 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. Further, the statutorily mandated functions required of the Commission are needed now more than ever.

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Andrew C. Tangen', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

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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