



**JOINT LEADERSHIP COUNCIL OF
VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS**

CHAIR'S 2011 ANNUAL REPORT

TO

COMMISSIONER PAUL E. GALANTI

AND

THE BOARD OF VETERANS SERVICES

November 30, 2011

Table of Contents

Chair’s Message	3
The Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations.....	4
2011 – 2012 Initiatives	7
JLC Position Paper: Unclaimed Cremated Remains of Veterans.....	8
JLC Position Paper: Sales and Use Tax Exemption for Veterans Service Organizations	9
JLC Position Paper – Homeless Veterans	10
JLC Position Paper: Veterans Identification	11
JLC Links to other Boards/Councils	12

Chair's Message

The Joint Leadership Council (JLC) of Veterans Service Organizations advocates for positive change for our veterans and their families, to improve their lives and increase their equity as veteran-citizens of this Commonwealth. We owe them both our hard work and difficult decisions for all they have sacrificed and suffered so we may all enjoy the freedom given us through our "membership" in this Commonwealth and our great Nation.

The JLC is comprised of 23 veterans service organizations (VSOs), and represents over 250,000 VSO members who volunteer to improve the lives of Virginia's 823,000 veterans. Veterans comprise nearly 10% of the Commonwealth's citizenry, giving Virginia one of the highest per capita populations of veterans in the country.

Five of the JLC's six initiatives were acted on by the Governor and 2011 General Assembly. Most notably, additional funding was provided to meet critical shortfalls in the Department of Veterans Services (DVS), including filling four claims agent positions and purchasing much-needed equipment for the state veterans cemeteries. Additional funding was also provided for the Virginia War Memorial. On the legislative front, bills were passed that will allow cities and counties to establish special judicial procedures for veterans and military service members, and the one-year residency requirement necessary to qualify for in-state tuition rates was waived for veterans.

In these austere times, we deeply respect the work that faces both the Governor and General Assembly as they lead us to economic recovery. Each member of the JLC recognizes the pinch of the current recession and is dedicated to finding innovative, creative ways to help create efficiencies and increase revenue for the Commonwealth while supporting our veterans. We advocate for what our veterans need, all within the constraints imposed by current realities.

On July 13, we chose four initiatives to help our veterans and their families. These recommendations were submitted to Governor McDonnell as part of Executive Order 29 (EO29). We will work diligently with the Governor and members of the General Assembly to prepare for the 2012 General Assembly, to improve the lives of our greatest citizens, our veterans and their families, to whom we owe so much.

Respectfully,

Jenny M. Holbert, Chair
Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps, Retired

The Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations

The members of the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (the JLC) represent 23 veterans service organizations (VSOs) in Virginia, that, combined, have more than 250,000 members. The JLC was created by Virginia statute in 2003 to be a voice for Virginia's veterans. JLC members are appointed by the Governor for three-year terms. The JLC meets at least four times a year and meetings are open to the public.

Member Organizations

As of November 30, 2011, twenty-three VSOs were represented on the JLC:

- Air Force Association
- American Ex-Prisoners of War
- American Legion
- AMVETS
- Association of the United States Army
- Disabled American Veterans
- Fleet Reserve Association
- Korean War Veterans Association
- Legion of Valor of the US, Inc.
- Marine Corps League
- Military Officers Association of America
- Military Order of the Purple Heart
- Military Order of the World Wars
- National Association for Uniformed Services
- Navy Seabee Veterans of America
- Non Commissioned Officers Association
- Paralyzed Veterans of America
- Reserve Officers Association of the United States
- Roanoke Valley Veterans Council
- Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States
- Vietnam Veterans of America
- Virginia National Guard Association
- Women Marines Association

Mission Statement

The Council provides advice and assistance to the Governor and the Department of Veterans Services on matters of concern to the veterans community and provides a conduit of information to and from the veterans service organizations on policy and legislation, pending and enacted, as well as information on existing services.

Vision

The Council will:

- *Give the Department of Veterans Services a broader understanding of the services needed by veterans.*
- *Give veterans a broader understanding of the services available to them as citizens of Virginia.*
- *Help veterans and veterans' organizations achieve legislation or policy changes needed to improve veterans' services.*
- *Enhance communications between the public, the state government, and the state's veterans.*
- *Help the Governor and the Department of Veterans Services develop policies that improve services for Virginia's veterans.*
- *Help the General Assembly develop and pass laws that more clearly respond to veterans' needs.*

Issue Identification, Development, and Advocacy

As the voice of Virginia's veterans, the JLC identifies issues of concern to veterans, their spouses, orphans, and dependents and serves in an advisory capacity to the Virginia Department of Veterans Services. Each year, the JLC presents a list of key initiatives for consideration by the Governor and General Assembly. So, when you ask, "What are Virginia's veterans' issues?" the answer is clear – *these* are the top issues.

In 2011, the Governor and General Assembly acted on five of the JLC's six legislative objectives.

Communication

The JLC supports DVS by communicating information to veterans about their benefits, events, and issues. JLC members promptly relay information to the members of their respective organizations, amplifying the effectiveness of DVS' communications and initiatives. Additionally, cross-sharing of information has resulted in partnerships and cooperative efforts among the various veterans service organizations.

For More Information

Please visit the JLC page on the DVS website at <http://www.dvs.virginia.gov/board-jlc.shtml>, or contact:

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2011 – 2012 Initiatives

The following initiatives were adopted by the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (the JLC) on July 13, 2011. These issues have the unanimous support of the 23 Veterans Service Organizations represented on the JLC.

Legislative Objectives

Unclaimed Cremated Remains of Veterans: Facilitate the honorable burial of the unclaimed cremated remains (cremains) of Virginia veterans in a state veterans cemetery by requiring funeral homes to provide the names of unclaimed cremains to the Department of Veterans Services (DVS). DVS can screen the names to identify those belonging to a veteran and determine if he/she is eligible for burial in a state veterans cemetery.

Sales and Use Tax Exemption for Veterans Service Organizations: Recognize the community service and philanthropic contributions of Virginia's Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) by establishing an exemption for VSOs from state and local Sales or Use Taxes.

Budget Objectives

Homeless Veterans: Reduce and prevent veterans homelessness in Virginia by implementing as many strategies identified in the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) 2010 study as state fiscal resources will allow.

Administrative Objectives

Veterans Identification: Provide a simple, ready means of identification of veterans status for Virginia's veterans by creating a Virginia Veterans Identification Card or by adding a veterans indicator to the Virginia Driver's License/ID Card.

JLC Position Paper: Unclaimed Cremated Remains of Veterans

1. **OBJECTIVE:** Facilitate the honorable burial of the unclaimed cremated remains (cremains) of Virginia Veterans in a state veterans cemetery.
2. **BACKGROUND:**
 - The cremains of Veterans sometimes go unclaimed by family from funeral homes. When this happens, the cremains may sit on shelves in funeral homes for years or even decades.
 - The Code of Virginia allows funeral homes to dispose of unclaimed cremains after 90 days, but many funeral homes retain unclaimed cremains in storage for extended periods.
 - The Virginia Department of Veterans Services (DVS) operates state veterans cemeteries in Amelia, Dublin, and Suffolk that provide honorable burials to qualified veterans.
 - If a set of unclaimed cremains can be positively identified as belonging to a veteran, and if that veteran is eligible for burial in a veterans cemetery, then DVS can provide that veteran with a dignified burial and an honorable final resting place among his/her comrades in arms.
 - While the Code of Virginia allows funeral homes to dispose of unclaimed cremains, it does not require the funeral homes to provide the names of the unclaimed cremains to DVS for determination of veterans status.
 - In an effort to encourage funeral homes to provide the names of unclaimed cremains, DVS signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 2009 with the Virginia Funeral Directors Association (VFDA) – one of the four funeral director associations in Virginia.
 - The other three funeral directors associations did not wish to sign an MOU with DVS.
 - Though the MOU with the VFDA has been in effect for two years, few names have been provided by funeral homes to DVS for determination of veterans status and eligibility.
 - DVS staff members have made a considerable effort to request the names of unclaimed cremains from funeral directors, but have met with limited success, as have the efforts of the non-profit Missing in America Project (MIAP) in Virginia.
3. **DISCUSSION:**
 - Veterans who served our Nation honorable deserve an honorable final resting place among their comrades in arms, not to end up unclaimed and forgotten on the back shelf of a closet in a funeral home.
 - If provided the names of unclaimed cremains, DVS can work with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to identify those belonging to Veterans, and can determine if they are eligible for burial in a state veterans cemetery.
 - The Code of Virginia gives funeral directors the authority to transfer the unclaimed cremains of Veterans to DVS for honorable burial.
4. **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Governor propose legislation requiring funeral homes to provide the names of unclaimed cremains to the Department of Veterans Services, in order to facilitate the honorable burial of unclaimed cremains of Virginia Veterans in a state veterans cemetery.

JLC Position Paper: Sales and Use Tax Exemption for Veterans Service Organizations

1. **OBJECTIVE:** To recognize the community service and philanthropic contributions of Virginia's Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) by establishing an exemption for VSOs from state and local Sales or Use Taxes.

2. **BACKGROUND:**
 - The IRS has recognized VSOs as exempt from federal income tax under section 501 (c) (19) of the Internal Revenue Code.
 - The Code of Virginia 58.1-609.11. Exemptions for nonprofit entities provides an exemption for sales or use taxes for entities exempt from federal income taxation under 501 (c) (3) or 501 (c) (4) of the Internal Revenue Code.
 - VSOs classified as 501 (c) (19) perform essentially the same functions as those classified as 501 (c) (3) or 501 (c) (4).
 - For example, the VFW Congressional Charter establishes "charitable" as one of the purposes of the organization
 - In 2010, the VFW Department of Virginia and Auxiliaries reported the expenditure of \$1,852,292 and a donation of 339,052 volunteer hours in support of numerous community activities for the citizens of the Commonwealth
 - The VFW volunteer hours cited are valued at \$8,926,533, making the total value of contributions approximately \$11.0 million annually
 - Similarly, in 2009, the American Legion reported the expenditure of \$3,193,679 and a donation of 452,411 volunteer hours in support of community service
 - Other smaller VSOs also contribute dollars and hours in support of community service

3. **DISCUSSION:**
 - Given the level of community service performed by VSOs as expressed in dollars and hours, VSOs should be accorded the same sales and use tax exemption as 501 (c) (3)s and 501 (c) (4)s
 - An exemption would free sales and use tax dollars spent on maintenance, cleaning, and office supplies for additional community service expenditures.
 - VSOs that provide food/beverage service in conjunction with Bingo operations would no longer be double taxed.
 - Currently VSOs pay sales tax on purchase of supplies and sales tax on gross proceeds.
 - The neighboring states of Maryland, West Virginia, and North Carolina provide sales and use tax exemption for VSOs.
 - Providing sales and use tax exemption to VSOs will continue Virginia's move toward making Virginia "the most veteran-friendly state in the nation."

4. **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Governor and General Assembly establish a sales and use tax exemption in the Code of Virginia for VSOs.

JLC Position Paper – Homeless Veterans

WHEREAS, homelessness has been a long-term issue and now is a growing problem within the population of veterans in the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, trends reported by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, veterans advocacy groups, and social services agencies show that there has been a significant increase in the number of women veterans among the homeless; and

WHEREAS, trends reported by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, veterans advocacy groups, and social services agencies show that veterans of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan are becoming homeless at a faster rate than did veterans of previous conflicts; and

WHEREAS, the goal of reducing homelessness among Virginia’s veterans may be a long term program; and

WHEREAS, action must be taken to start the process of reducing homelessness and the veterans homeless population provides a strong starting point because of the discipline they share, because they are readily identifiable, and because of the benefits they may incur by participating; and

WHEREAS, homeless veteran “stand downs” have been proven to be a successful method of attracting homeless veterans and providing them with access to veterans and employment services; and

WHEREAS, Governor McDonnell’s Executive Order Number 29 seeks to address veterans homelessness in conjunction with Executive Order Number 10; and

WHEREAS, in 2010, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) documented the estimated size and nature of the problem and provided eighteen potential strategies to reduce and prevent veterans homelessness; therefore be it

RESOLVED by the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations, That the Governor take another step toward making Virginia the nation’s most veteran-friendly state by implementing as many strategies identified by JLARC as state fiscal resources will allow.

JLC Position Paper: Veterans Identification

1. **OBJECTIVE:** To provide a simple, ready means of identification for Virginia's veterans.
2. **BACKGROUND:**
 - Retired service personnel, including those that are medically retired, receive a United States Uniformed Services Identification Card (DD Form 2 (Retired)).
 - All other veterans who have served in the active military, naval, or air service and who have been released there from under conditions other than dishonorable receive a Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty (DD Form 214) as evidence of their service and a Discharge Certificate. Neither of these documents are suitable substitutes for an identification card.
 - Veterans who receive medical care through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs receive a veterans identification card. However, only 15% of Virginia's veterans qualify for USDVA medical care.
3. **DISCUSSION:**
 - Those veterans who wish to prove veterans status, but who lack government-issued identification (ID) cards, are obligated to produce their DD 214 or other discharge papers, which are not documents that conveniently can be carried on a daily basis.
 - A method of honoring Virginia's veterans and providing them with a convenient ID would be to create a Virginia Veterans Identification Card or to add their veterans service status to their Virginia Drivers License or to their state-issued ID if the veteran so requests. Other states have implemented the driver's license feature, most recently North Carolina and Utah.
 - Each time a Virginia veteran uses a Virginia Veterans ID Card or driver's license/state ID with veterans indicator, the veteran's honorable service to Virginia and the Nation would be easily and immediately recognized.
 - A separate veterans identification card or indicator on a driver's license or state ID would help qualify for commercial discounts (restaurants and other stores) or other cost saving features (such as free access to Virginia's parks or reduced fishing license fees).
 - Having a veterans identifier could help law enforcement when officers come across a veteran in a tense situation where the veteran may be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and other emotional battle scars. The knowledge can be used by law enforcement to decrease the volatility of a potentially dangerous situation.
 - Veterans requesting an ID Card or license designation would need to show their DD-214 as evidence of their service and their discharge. Active Duty, Retired, or members of the National Guard or Reserve would present their current military ID.
4. **RECOMMENDATION:** The JLC recommends that the Governor and General Assembly support the creation of a Virginia Veterans ID Card or driver's license designator.

JLC Links to other Boards/Councils

- **Board of Veterans Services** (JLC Chair serves as *ex officio* member)
- **Veterans Services Foundation** (JLC Chair serves as *ex officio* member)
- **Virginia Military Advisory Council** (Jeff Platte, JLC Representative)
- **Virginia Council on the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children** (Chip Moran, JLC Representative)