

Executive Order 19

Serving Virginia's Veterans

Report to
Governor Timothy M. Kaine

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Serving Virginia's Veterans

Introduction

Nearly 740,000 veterans live in Virginia, placing the Commonwealth 11th in the nation in terms of its veteran population. Fourteen percent of these veterans receive benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). And, Virginia's veterans represent approximately 16 percent of the voting population.

In Federal Fiscal Year 2005 (October 1, 2004 – September 30, 2005), veterans accounted for \$5.33 billion in direct federal spending in Virginia. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs expended \$1.85 billion on compensation and pension benefits, health care, cemetery services, and construction, while the U.S. Department of Defense paid \$3.48 billion in retirement pay to Virginia's veterans.

Veterans have a significant impact within the business community as well. A 2003 residential survey showed that 23 percent of veterans in the household population were either in the process of or considering purchasing or starting a new business. Further, nearly 72 percent of these prospective entrepreneurs intended to hire at least one employee.

Because of their military service and sacrifices, as well as the sacrifices made by veterans' families, Americans enjoy a democracy and affluence unparalleled anywhere else in the world. While we can never fully repay our debt to veterans, it is critical that the Commonwealth acknowledge their military service through programs that assist them with transitioning from military to civilian life, ensure that their health care needs are met, and that provide meaningful employment opportunities as well as opportunities for veteran-owned businesses. We must also care for veterans in need such as those who have become homeless, incarcerated or hospitalized.

Executive Order 19 (EO 19, Appendix 1), signed by Governor Timothy M. Kaine on June 16, 2006, directs the Virginia Department of Veterans Services (DVS)¹ to prepare a comprehensive report on the status of state programs and services for veterans. The Order requires DVS and other state agencies to find ways to offer new, expanded or customized services that will meet the educational, health care and social service needs of Virginia's veterans, giving special attention to disabled veterans. In addition, it directs all state agency heads to renew their commitment to giving veterans preference when hiring.

¹ The Virginia Department of Veterans Services operates 23 benefit services offices where representatives assist veterans and their family members in filing claims for VA benefits. The agency operates two cemeteries for veterans: the Virginia Veterans Cemetery in Amelia and the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery in Suffolk. A third state veterans cemetery in Dublin, Virginia is in the initial stages of development. DVS operates the Virginia Veterans Care Center (VVCC) in Roanoke. The VVCC is a long-term care facility offering nursing and domiciliary care for veterans. The SitterBarfoot Veterans Care Center is under construction in Richmond and is slated to open in 2007. The agency also certifies that post-secondary educational institutions meet G.I. Bill funding and eligibility requirements, enabling veterans and family members to pursue educational opportunities.

In response to EO 19, DVS, the Board of Veterans Services and the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations submitted legislative proposals for the 2007 session of the General Assembly to the Governor, and DVS presented an interim report to the Governor in fall 2006 detailing the status of veterans services in Virginia (Appendix 2). This current report fulfills the final directive in EO 19 and presents new initiatives that will further improve services and opportunities for Virginia's veterans.

During the past nine months, DVS staff members met individually with numerous state agencies to discuss existing services for veterans and possible partnerships for new services. The agency also hosted a number of meetings that brought together agency heads from several agencies to discuss common veterans issues and strategize ways to address them.

During March, DVS held five town hall meetings to gather input from veterans and their family members and to start a productive dialog between Virginia's veterans and state government. Meetings were held in Fredericksburg, Suffolk, Abingdon, Roanoke, and Richmond.

Each meeting was conducted by a professional facilitator from Virginia Commonwealth University. In the meetings, veterans were asked to talk about what is working well and what is not working well, and they were asked to offer solutions. In each of the meetings, veterans commented on DVS, the need for better communication about benefits, veterans health care, the need for improved benefits at the state level, and the need for support for spouses and family members. One message that came through loud and clear was the need for a single voice to speak out for veterans and address issues with the VA, Congress, and other policy makers.

As with any population, Virginia faces a number of issues specific to veterans. Primary issues include quality of life issues such as delivery of behavioral health care and other services; employment and workforce development for veterans; outreach to veterans, especially to make them aware of the services provided by DVS and other state agencies; and the effective use of technology to serve and communicate with veterans.

Twenty-eight initiatives are presented in this report and are categorized as technology, workforce development, outreach, or quality of life. Work on nine of them is already in progress. The last section of the report prioritizes each initiative as either short or long-term. Initiatives are also categorized in terms of administrative, legislative and budget priorities.

While this report is the final component of Governor Kaine's Executive Order 19, it is the first step in creating an integrated service delivery system that will support and honor Virginia's veterans. The initiatives in this report represent a roadmap for the work that lies ahead, and this is a living document that will be constantly revisited and enhanced. DVS anticipates providing an annual update on the progress of the initiatives proposed in this report as well as new initiatives that will further enhance Virginia's service to veterans.

This report to Governor Kaine sets forth a comprehensive and ambitious agenda for the Department of Veterans Services, the agencies of state government, veterans service organizations, and many private organizations and individuals. DVS expresses its gratitude to everyone involved in

the development of these initiatives. It is clear from this report that many of the initiatives are underway with the enthusiastic support of state agencies and other public and private organizations. The depth of this initial report exemplifies the dedication of the Administration, the General Assembly, state agencies, public and private organizations, and individuals throughout the Commonwealth to serving the needs of Virginia's veterans.

Technology Initiatives

Internet Portal

Numerous resources and information sites for veterans and their families exist; however, there is no centralized collection or access point. DVS proposes creating an Internet portal that will provide descriptions of and links to the federal, state, and local agencies that provide services for veterans as well as to non-profit and private sector service providers. Resources listed on this site need not be exclusively for veterans. For example, the site will list numerous state agencies, such as the Departments of Rehabilitative Services (DRS), Social Services (DSS), Aging (VDA), Health (VDH), and Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse (DMHMRSAS) since these agencies provide services that veterans may need. The portal will feature a robust search feature that will ensure that veterans and their family members are able to locate the needed resources.

As the state's technology capabilities mature, the portal can be expanded to present a uniform assessment tool which veterans and family members can complete online. This assessment tool will identify their needs and the services for which they qualify. The veteran or family member will receive a listing of the programs they may qualify for as well as contact information for each program. Additionally, the information that the veteran enters into the assessment tool can be transmitted to the appropriate agencies so that those agencies can establish a record and follow up with the veteran or his/her family member(s).

DVS may be able to tap into the No Wrong Door electronic system that VDA is developing as well as the Spyder system being implemented by DSS. The VDA's No Wrong Door electronic system will collect data from the Uniform Assessment Instrument², maintain a directory of service providers, and will be used to coordinate the best available services for clients and to track referrals and service delivery. Spyder will enable DSS workers to determine if an individual is already known to the agency as well as obtain information electronically about the individual from other agencies, such as the Department of Motor Vehicles and the Social Security Administration.

DVS proposes working with the Virginia Information Technologies Agency for assistance in conceptualizing the Internet portal, and with VDA and DSS about inclusion in No Wrong Door and Spyder.

² The Uniform Assessment Instrument is a screening tool used by state agencies to determine an individual's eligibility for adult services.

TurboVet

Title 38 of the United States Code (CFR 38) governs administration of veterans benefits and services. Like the tax code it is extremely complex. It takes three to five years for a Department of Veterans Services (DVS) benefits services representative to learn and become proficient in all areas of Title 38. For the veteran trying to represent himself, it can be nearly impossible to decipher the laws and regulations.

DVS is developing a TurboTax®-type software application (TurboVet³) that will assist both veterans and benefit service representatives in preparing and submitting claims to the Veterans Administration. Such a software application will positively impact the VA by improving the accuracy of applications and ensuring that supporting information is presented in a clear and consistent manner. Additionally, as the application matures, it will pave the way for electronic submission of claims, thus expediting claims processing and receipt of benefits.

Like TurboTax®, TurboVet will use an interactive format to guide the veteran or benefits service representative through a series of questions. Using decision-tree logic, this software will drill down into specific topics, as appropriate, while filling in the claims form. The software will be able to provide the veteran or his/her benefit service representative with a list of the required supporting documentation as well.

TurboVet will also help veterans identify their needs and locate resources that will address those needs. Many services are available—some designed specifically for veterans and others that veterans, as part of the general population, can use. However, no central listing or access to all these resources exists. Using the interactive, question-and-answer format and the decision tree logic, TurboVet will identify additional resources that the veteran may wish to pursue.

DVS has developed a scope of work for a demonstration pilot that will:

- Create a secure pilot web portal through which veteran, his or her beneficiaries or representatives, can enter and navigate the veterans benefit claims process for federal and state veterans' benefits.
- Replicate as much of the current capabilities of DVS' Representative Veterans Database (RVD) as feasibly possible and provide clean consolidated veteran information for the agency in future applications.
- Apply the TurboTax® concept of plain English, intelligent computer interviews and data quality control to selected activities within the veterans' claims process.
- Develop a comprehensive plan for system analysis, development and deployment of the full concept of TurboVet.
- Develop a detailed price breakdown and timeline for fully realizing the concept of TurboVet.

DVS anticipates award of a contract by the end of May 2007 and completion of a TurboVet

³ The name TurboVet will be researched for possible trademark infringements on Intuit's TurboTax.

demonstration project by mid summer. The agency expects release of a request for proposal for system analysis and development of the full TurboVet product by the end of September.

The agency recommends continued support of and funding for development of TurboVet.

Upgrade the DVS Technology Infrastructure

In preparation for the Internet portal and TurboVet, DVS has embarked on two significant upgrades to its technology infrastructure. Additionally, the agency is exploring the use of technology to improve training for DVS benefit services representatives.

RVD Conversion

Currently, DVS agents use the Representative Veterans Database (RVD) system to create the electronic file which generates a veteran's hard copy application for a benefit claim. Data for these electronic files is stored in individual Access databases which are housed on each agent's laptop and synchronized with and backed up on the server for the agent's office. This means that DVS maintains more than 20 individual databases housing veterans' data with no central access to this data.

DVS has begun a project to consolidate these multiple databases into a single Microsoft SQL server platform. This consolidation will improve data security by combining all data and housing it in a single, central and more secure location. It will eliminate duplicate claims and reduce the incidence of veterans "shopping" DVS offices; e.g., submitting claims at multiple DVS offices. It will also make a veteran's data accessible by DVS benefit services representatives anywhere in the state. As a result, veterans will not be required to continue visiting the same office if they need to follow-up on their claims.

Following implementation of the RVD conversion project during the second and third quarters of 2007, DVS will focus on coordinating development of the Internet portal and TurboVet to ensure that as these projects mature they take full advantage of all the data and information resident in RVD. DVS currently plans to replace RVD with the first production version of TurboVet. Because the agency believes in the value of one tool for a given line of service delivery, DVS has stipulated that from inception, TurboVet must be capable of doing everything that RVD currently does. Thus, the DVS benefit services representative will always use one tool to deliver services to our customer, Virginia's veterans.

Digital Imaging

Following consolidation of multiple databases housing benefits claims data, DVS will digitize and electronically store all hard copy documents and correspondence. DVS has initiated a pilot project in the Richmond field office to scan all documents, index the documents, create master and duplicate electronic files, and destroy paper files. The vendor picked up approximately 235,000 documents from the pilot office in early April and anticipates returning the files in a converted, compressed and usable format by mid May.

Electronic storage of hard copy files offers several advantages. First, documents can be accessed by any DVS office anywhere in the state. Second, electronic storage of documents significantly reduces the amount of space required to house historical documents and will greatly reduce the amount of rented office space required for the agency's benefit services offices. This will translate into reduced rental costs and more opportunities for co-location with other agencies. The agency will also realize

savings in human resources by reassigning staff from menial filing and paper-handling tasks to tasks directly related to serving veterans.

Once conversion of the records in the Richmond office is completed, DVS will evaluate the results. If conversion is satisfactory, the agency will select a second pilot office for conversion and will also explore purchase of scanners so that DVS offices can scan and electronically store documents on an ongoing basis. Once the agency is satisfied with the conversion process, accessibility, and security of electronically stored records, it will request funding so that all records can be converted and stored electronically.

Learning Management System

DVS also plans to turn to technology to deliver training to DVS employees. The Commonwealth's Learning Management System (LMS), a joint venture between state agencies and Meridian Knowledge Solutions, Inc., offers web-based software that enables management and delivery of online training content. Employees can access LMS training modules anywhere, anytime, an ideal solution for DVS which has 23 benefit services offices scattered across the state plus staff at two administrative locations, two cemeteries, and two care centers.

LMS provides planning, delivery, and management of all learning events, including online, virtual classroom and instructor-led courses. It replaces fragmented learning programs with a systematic means of assessing and raising competency and performance levels throughout the agency. LMS also tracks participants' progress and performance across all types of training activities. LMS can be used to provide refresher material if an employee encounters an unfamiliar topic or is asked to make a presentation.

The learning curve for using LMS to manage and deliver training content, however, is high. Two DVS staff will attend a second training class to learn how to use the system. In the meantime, DVS staff members have met with representatives from the Veterans Administration to discuss using VA training materials in the LMS system and as part of the training program for DVS benefit services representatives.

The agency plans to continue negotiations with the VA for the use of training materials and will develop a timeline for development of an LMS training program for DVS employees by early summer.

Workforce Development Initiatives

Integrated Workforce Development

Multiple state and local agencies in Virginia, plus federal agencies and private sector organizations, offer career and employment-related assistance to veterans, disabled veterans, and employers. Rehabilitation, training and education programs are offered as well. However, these programs are rarely integrated or linked and little attention is given to employment of spouses and dependents of veterans. Additionally, although resources exist, there is little sharing of these resources between agencies across state, local, and federal levels of government.

Through partnerships and utilization of existing programs offered by the Governors Office for Workforce Development and Virginia's Workforce Centers, the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC), Virginia community colleges, four-year colleges and universities as well as other state, local and federal agencies and private sector organizations, Virginia can create a single enterprise solution that provides a one-stop system for workforce development for veterans, disabled veterans, their spouses and dependents. This one-stop system can provide a full array of career development and employment-related services to all veterans, employers, and veterans interested in establishing their own businesses.

Ideally, resources will include career and educational counseling, financial aid application assistance, veterans benefits services, disability assessments, skills assessment, access to training and rehabilitation programs, resume development and interviewing skills, training and counseling for small business operation, and mentorship. Resources will also provide employers with the ability to identify a pool of qualified applicants for specific jobs, opportunities for recruiting qualified applicants, assistance with creating tailored training programs, and assistance in retaining employees who are veterans. Retention assistance will address veteran-specific issues such as service-connected physical and emotional disabilities and the successful transition from military to civilian life. Services must be delivered in a variety of ways—electronically, one-on-one, and in group settings. Most importantly, this workforce development system must be seamlessly accessible to military service members prior to separation from the military as well as after separation and must be easily accessible to disabled veterans.

Many of the components of a seamless and comprehensive workforce development program already exist and are administered by various state and local agencies. DVS recommends creation of a task force to examine how existing services can be presented to military service personnel, veterans, disabled veterans, their spouses and dependents in a centralized manner, and to identify additional services needed to create a comprehensive workforce development initiative in Virginia. The agency further recommends that special attention be given to workforce development for disabled veterans. Additionally, DVS recommends that the Commonwealth designate veterans as a priority within Virginia's workforce system.

Awareness Campaign for Employers

Veterans offer a wealth of skills and abilities, often developed through their military experience, making them outstanding employees. However, the unique qualities that military members bring to the workforce must be marketed to prospective employers. A campaign targeted to employers can raise awareness about the benefits of hiring veterans and encourage employers to grant preference to veterans when making hiring decisions. As an added benefit, an awareness campaign can further promote the services provided to employers by the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC). VEC offers an automated job matching service that matches the skill sets requested by employers against job applicants in the VEC database.

Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) created the 5-Star Employer Program which informs employers about their rights and responsibilities toward employees who serve in the Guard and Reserve. This program also publicly recognizes employers who go above and beyond the requirements of the law.

Raising awareness and giving recognition for exceeding goals can be an effective combination for changing employer behavior and increasing employment of veterans in positions commensurate with their knowledge, skills and abilities. The 5-Star Employer Program, with its proven success, can be an effective model for creating a similar program to encourage employers to hire veterans. The U.S. Department of Labor's *HireVetsFirst* program also offers a wealth of resources to veterans, employers, and potential small business owners.

DVS recommends using the 5-Star Employer Program as a model and also finding ways to partner with or build on the *HireVetsFirst* program to improve awareness among employers of the unique talents that veterans bring to Virginia's workforce.

Employment Opportunities for Veterans with Disabilities

Executive Order 19 emphasizes the need for special attention to opportunities and enhanced services for veterans with disabilities. One of the most important components of a disabled veteran's successful reintegration into his family and community is employment.

As DVS staff researched opportunities for EO 19, agency staff learned that several state agencies have initiatives targeting disabled veterans. The Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) offers assistance to disabled veterans through the federally funded Disabled Veterans Outreach Program. The Rehabilitation and Research Training Center at Virginia Commonwealth University has conducted research on the employment needs of disabled veterans, and the Virginia Department of Transportation has launched an intern program for disabled veterans. Most recently, the Departments of Veterans Services (DVS), Rehabilitation Services (DRS) and VEC partnered with TecAccess, a small, woman-owned technology firm, to develop a training and employment program for disabled veterans.

The Disabled Veteran Training and Employment Program (DVET) will identify, accommodate, train and hire 16 veterans over a 12-month period. Program participants will be trained and employed as information technology (IT) accessibility consultants, trainers, and testers. The program received \$200,000 in Governor's Discretionary funds from the Workforce Investment Act, administered by the Senior Advisor to the Governor for Workforce Development, and is being implemented through a memorandum of understanding between the Department of Veterans Services, the Department of Rehabilitative Services, the Virginia Employment Commission, and TecAccess.

DVS hosted a mini-symposium on April 26 for state agencies to present information about their programs for disabled veterans, exchange ideas and explore possible partnerships. Participants included the Governor's Senior Advisor for Disability Issues and Concerns; Virginia Employment Commission—Disabled Veterans Outreach Program and Local Veterans Employment Representatives; Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU)—Rehabilitation Training and Research Center; Virginia Department of Transportation—Wounded Veterans Program; Department of Rehabilitative Services; Governor's Office for Workforce Development; Department of Human Resources, the U.S. Department of Labor; and TecAccess.

A review of research conducted by the VCU Rehabilitation Training and Research Center was followed by a discussion of how the VEC serves disabled veterans in Virginia, the number and needs of wounded veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, and ways to integrate workforce development services for disabled veterans.

The group will continue discussion via email, exchanging program descriptions and a written summary of VCU's research. The group supported DVS' recommendation under the Initiative for

Integrated Workforce Development to establish a task force to examine workforce development in Virginia for all veterans with special attention given to the needs of disabled veterans.

In terms of disabled veterans, DVS recommends that the task force first collect data on the numbers of disabled veterans in Virginia who are seeking employment. In addition, it should develop a mechanism for projecting the numbers of individuals with disabilities returning from the Global War on Terror who will need assistance in finding employment. Concurrently, the task force will need to develop better information on employers who are interested and willing to hire disabled veterans. Information about veterans and employers should be collected by region so that matching vets to jobs can be facilitated. The task force should look for innovative ways to facilitate the hiring process for both interested employers and disabled veterans.

DVS recommends that the task force explore re-training opportunities for veterans whose disabilities make them ineligible to return to their civilian jobs. Of particular concern are veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with cognitive disabilities.

It was recommended that the task force examine the feasibility of state incentives for employers to hire disabled veterans, including tax incentives. In addition, the task force should consider the need for establishing job fairs for returning veterans. One model for this is the regional approach used by the Governor's Office for Workforce Development to address factory closings in Virginia. This approach concentrates the resources of relevant state agencies, interested employers, and other public and private partners in the area where the closings occurred to assist individuals seeking re-employment and other services.

Participants in the mini-symposium agreed that the Commonwealth should first review its own record for hiring disabled veterans and look at opportunities and incentives for state agencies to hire veterans, particularly those with disabilities. DHRM indicates that state agencies have an excellent record for hiring veterans at all levels. However, the Commonwealth is facing the potential retirement of significant numbers of baby-boomers, including those in upper and middle management. The leadership skills of veterans returning from military duty could be an asset for the state, particularly if state agencies are able to provide assistance in translating military experience into skills relevant for state agency employment. Opportunities for telework should be explored since this could benefit state agencies as well as veterans who prefer to work from home or remote locations.

The following initiative in this report, Veterans Hiring Preference in State Government, sets out the provisions of legislation passed in the 2007 Session of the General Assembly that requires DHRM to develop guidelines for state agencies to give veterans preference in hiring. It was suggested in the mini-symposium that the VDOT Wounded Veterans Internship Program serve as a model for state agencies to use in implementing the hiring preference for disabled veterans. The VDOT program is funded by a federal grant and is being touted as a model program for transportation agencies across the country. It was noted, however, that if state agencies are to replicate this program, either state or federal resources will be required.

DVS recommends that the task force look at the availability of existing funding streams, either federal or state, to provide job opportunities for disabled veterans. As noted in the initiative for Veterans Hiring Preference in State Government, DVS recommends that a dedicated position be

placed in DHRM to focus on veterans hiring preference in state government. DVS also recommends holding a focus group with VEC Local Veteran Employment Representatives (LVER), Disabled Veteran Outreach Program (DVOP) representatives and DVS staff to look for opportunities for increased partnership between the two agencies.

Veterans Hiring Preference in State Government

House Bill 2840 and Senate Bill 1033, passed by the 2007 General Assembly, strengthen veterans preference in state government hiring. The phrase “*such veteran’s military service shall be taken into consideration by the Commonwealth during the selection process*” was changed to read “*such veteran shall be given preference by the Commonwealth during the selection process.*”

The Department of Human Resource Management (DHRM) is required to “*distribute guidelines as an addendum to the Hiring Policy for Executive Branch agencies to provide guidance to agencies to comply with the veterans’ preference requirement.*”

DHRM has requested that the members of the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (the JLC) submit to the Department of Veterans Services (DVS) ideas and suggestions that will help DHRM in preparing the veterans’ preference hiring guidelines. DHRM has also requested that the JLC review the draft guidelines prior to distribution to state agencies.

The Department of Veterans Services recommends placing a new position within DHRM to coordinate implementation of the new veterans’ preference requirement and to serve as the Commonwealth’s lead agent on the hiring of veterans within state government.

Outreach to Veteran-Owned Businesses and Potential Entrepreneurs

According to a residential survey conducted by Waldman Associates and Reda International in 2003⁴, slightly more than 23 percent of veterans in the household population were either purchasing or starting a new business or were considering purchasing or starting up a business. Nearly 72 percent of these potential veteran entrepreneurs intended to hire at least one employee.

The survey also found that the availability of resources and government programs ranked high on the list of veteran entrepreneur's concerns as did the existence of useful government and private programs for both entrepreneurs and service-disabled veteran entrepreneurs. The study further revealed that veteran entrepreneurs planned to rely on the leadership skills, training, and technology experience gained during their active duty service.

Clearly, veterans as entrepreneurs can and do have a significant impact on the economy. Their military service provides them with the skills and knowledge that enables them to transition into valuable assets within the business community. However, to truly flourish, additional assistance is needed.

The Departments of Veterans Services (DVS), Minority Business Enterprises (DMBE), and General Services (DGS) met to discuss how to increase opportunities for veteran-owned businesses in Virginia. The agencies agreed to conduct outreach to veteran-owned businesses and to encourage them to register with the Commonwealth of Virginia as Small Women and Minority Owned (SWAM) vendors.

The Department of General Services offered to post a survey on the eVA site that will ask participating vendors to identify themselves if they are veteran-owned businesses. The resulting data will enable these agencies to begin building a database of veteran-owned businesses. With this resource, partnering agencies can conduct research on the needs of veteran-owned businesses; increase the number of veteran- and service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses (SDVOSBs) registered with the Commonwealth of Virginia as Small, Women, and Minority Owned (SWAM) vendors; and, ensure that these vendors have access to state procurement opportunities.

With contact information for veteran-owned businesses, the agencies can also consider options for providing training, assistance, and mentorship through the Department of Business Assistance on topics of specific interest to veterans. Organizations such as the U.S. Association of Veterans in Business and the National Veteran-Owned Business Association are available to provide workshops and conferences for veteran-owned businesses. Further, DMBE can provide workshops that will help prepare veteran-owned business for SWAM certification and to successfully compete in state procurements.

⁴ *The Small Business Economy: A Report to the President*. Office of Advocacy, U.S. Small Business Administration. United States Government Printing Office, 2005.

DVS recommends formation of a task force to make further recommendations for the systematic identification of veteran-owned businesses and maintenance of a database with statistical and contact information. Additionally, this task force can be directed to conduct research on best practices, such as tax and other incentives, used in other states to cultivate and support veteran-owned businesses. Finally, this task force can work with veteran-owned businesses to explore their needs for educational programs, such as workshops and conferences, which address topics specific to veteran entrepreneurs.

Implement and Review Virginia's Legislation for Service-Disabled, Veteran-Owned Small Businesses (SDVOSBs)

Senate Bill 1145, passed by the 2007 Virginia General Assembly, prohibits discrimination by public bodies in the solicitation and awarding of contracts and requires public bodies to establish a program to facilitate the participation of businesses owned by service-disabled veterans in procurement transactions. The bill also requires the Department of Veterans Services (DVS) to establish a program to certify, upon request of a small business owner, that he or she holds "service disabled veteran" status. Under the definition of this bill, qualifying service-disabled veterans must have a 50 percent or greater service-connected disability rating or a 10 percent or greater service-connected disability rating if the disability is combat-related. Qualifying service-disabled, veteran-owned small businesses (SDVOSBs) must be at least 51 percent owned by one or more service disabled veterans or, in the case of a corporation, partnership, or limited liability company or other entity, at least 51 percent of the equity ownership interest in the corporation, partnership, or limited liability company or other entity must be owned by one or more individuals who are service-disabled veterans and both the management and daily business operations are controlled by one or more individuals who are service-disabled veterans.

DVS recommends placing a part-time position, preferably to be filled by a disabled veteran, in the Department of Minority Business Enterprises (DMBE) to assist in implementation of this legislation. This position will assist DMBE in publicizing the new legislation, conducting outreach and training for qualifying SDVOSBs, and monitoring the outcome of their participation in procurement to identify any disparities in their rate of success in obtaining contracts.

The federal government also has a program to stimulate the participation of service-disabled, veteran-owned small businesses in procurement. However, unlike the Virginia program, the federal SDVOSB program is open to all disabled veterans; e.g., those with a disability rating, fixed by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), of 0 percent to 100 percent. As of September 2006, there were 105,797 veterans in Virginia receiving compensation from the VA for a service-connected disability ranging from 0 percent to 100 percent. Of these 105,797 veterans, 31 percent or 32,472 veterans, had a disability rating of 50 percent or higher.

Some SDVOSB owners believe that Virginia's more restrictive eligibility requirements will impact procurement opportunities in those localities that use the federal guidelines. These business owners worry that localities will interpret the more restrictive state guideline as superseding the federal guidelines in use by local governments and lock out recognized federal SDVOSBs that do not meet the state standard.

DVS recommends a review of the bill's language to determine if it is advantageous to align Virginia's definition of service disability for the purpose of identifying an SDVOSB with the definition used in federal guidelines.

Outreach Initiatives

Increased Advocacy for Veterans

In each of the five town hall meetings conducted by the Department of Veterans Services, veterans consistently expressed the need for an advocate who can make their voices heard to Virginia's legislature and policymakers, Virginia's congressional representatives, and to the Veterans Administration (VA). They also want that advocate to ensure that their concerns are shared with other states through vehicles such as the National Association of Directors of State Departments of Veterans Affairs and the National Governor's Association.

The Department of Veterans Services already advocates for veterans individually. Therefore, it is logical that the agency should assume the role of advocating for veterans collectively. The agency has significant contact and access to Virginia's veterans plus one of its boards, the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (the JLC), is currently made up of representatives of 21 veterans service organizations.

The agency has already assumed this role by working with legislators every year on veteran-related legislation. During the 2007 legislative session, DVS worked with members of the JLC, Board of Veterans Services, Virginia Military Affairs Council, the Citizen Soldier Support Council, and the Virginia National Guard to develop a single legislative agenda for veteran- and military-related issues. The JLC developed seven legislative priorities for the 2007 General Assembly. Budget and legislative initiatives adopted by the General Assembly addressed five of these seven priorities.

The agency has moved further into the role of advocate by recognizing the need for more health care resources for veterans and by facilitating meetings between the VA and Virginia's Community Services Boards (this is discussed in the initiative for Provision of Behavioral Health Care Services by State Resources).

DVS plans to continue its active role in the legislative process, and to continue identifying veterans issues and facilitating development of solutions by bringing together the appropriate decision-makers. The agency also plans to continue an ongoing dialog with the VA about health care, benefit claims processing, and other veteran issues.

The agency recommends working with members of the JLC, Board of Veterans Services, and other military-related organizations to annually provide a list of veteran and military-related issues and priorities to the Governor prior to his participation in the National Governor's Association Conference. DVS will also provide these issues and priorities to Virginia's Congressional representatives on a routine basis, and ensure that they are communicated to other states through active participation in the National Association of Directors of State Departments of Veterans Affairs. The agency recommends annually communicating these issues to the Secretary for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Increased Awareness Among State Agencies About Veterans Issues and Service

Veterans and other state agencies alike often do not realize that the Virginia Department of Veterans Services (DVS) exists. To address this internally, DVS has created a communications plan and is in the process of developing an agency brand or identity.

Externally, to increase state agency awareness, DVS has contacted the Departments of Rehabilitative Services (DRS), Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services (DMHMRSAS), Social Services (DSS), Health (VDH), Aging (VDA), Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF), and the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC). Since these agencies have offices located across the state and high volume face-to-face contact with customers, DVS has requested that staff at each agency ask customers about their veteran status. As a first step, DVS has provided bookmarks listing all DVS locations and the website address for agency personnel to give to clients who are veterans. As a second step, DVS plans to provide these agencies with a desktop poster and brochure holder for DVS brochures. These brochures provide more detail about the agency's services.

DVS has also signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with DRS. In this MOU, the two agencies agree to cross-train agency staff about the benefits provided by each agency and to develop a referral process for clients.

DVS plans to expand distribution of DVS brochures to other state agencies such as ABC retail outlets, DMV offices, state parks and tourism centers, VDOT rest stops, community colleges and universities. Distribution of brochures, however, is just one approach. DVS plans to identify agency staff meetings and conferences and make presentations about veterans issues and the agency's services.

As noted in the initiative recommending symposiums and workshops on veterans issues, DVS recommends holding a seminar for state employees to discuss veterans issues, demonstrate how these issues cut across state agencies, and develop solutions to veterans issues. A seminar for state agency personnel will be key in developing a continuum of service model and no wrong door service philosophy discussed in the initiative for a Continuum of Service Model and No Wrong Door Philosophy.

Symposiums on Veteran-Related Issues

An effective way to raise awareness about veterans issues and create a continuum of service model and no wrong door philosophy for veterans is by directly involving state agencies and other key players in exploring the issues, identifying resources, and making policy recommendations. This can be done through symposiums that bring decision-makers together in a collaborative setting.

Several possibilities exist for symposiums that will be both informative and establish a collaborative setting. These symposiums can center on post traumatic stress disorder, veterans issues for state agencies, business assistance topics for veteran-owned small businesses, and workforce development for disabled veterans.

Symposium on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

DVS plans to partner with the Center for Substance Abuse Addiction Technology Transfer Center (housed at Virginia Commonwealth University) to host a symposium for state agencies on post-traumatic stress disorder. Rhode Island and North Carolina have hosted similar events. The Rhode Island conference focused on educating health professionals about the effects of combat and post-traumatic stress disorders on both military personnel and their family members. North Carolina used the summit to begin building a partnership between state and federal government and community providers and to create a system for post-deployment readjustment assistance for veterans and their families.

The Virginia conference will bring together a wide range of service providers from state agencies and will provide education about post-traumatic stress disorder and foster discussion about delivery of state services to address the resulting needs of veterans and their family members. Most importantly, however, this symposium will bring state agency representatives together to focus on veterans, illustrating to them that issues cut across a wide range of state services and that these issues must be addressed at the state level.

Symposium for state agencies on veterans issues

DVS recommends inviting Virginia Executive Institute or Commonwealth Management Institute alumni to a one day seminar on veterans issues. While the symposium will provide information about veterans and veteran-related benefits, it will also look at veterans issues, how they impact numerous state agencies, and how agencies can create a continuum of service model for veterans. Likewise, state agencies can have a significant impact in developing solutions to veterans issues through partnerships among agencies and policy development.

Topics will include

- Military and veterans presence in Virginia and the economic and other impacts on the Commonwealth
- Veterans issues, such as the increased demand for mental health and substance abuse services for troops returning from the Global War on Terror, health issues specific to veterans, the state's aging veteran population, veterans in the workforce, and veterans as small business owners

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- Benefits available to veterans at the local, state and federal levels
 - Veterans with special needs, such as incarcerated, homeless, and hospitalized veterans
 - Support for families of veterans
 - Discussion about how Virginia's state agencies currently support the state's veteran population and ways that this support can be streamlined and strengthened

Business assistance workshops for veteran-owned small businesses

As noted in the initiative discussing outreach to veteran-owned small businesses, these entrepreneurs have a significant impact on the economy and within the business community. Their entrepreneurial savvy is often built on leadership skills, training, and experience with technology gained during their military service. However, to truly flourish, these entrepreneurs need additional assistance.

Several resources exist within Virginia state government—the Departments of Business Assistance (DBA), Minority Business Enterprise (DMBE), the Governor's Office for Workforce Development and Virginia's Workforce Centers, and the Commonwealth's community colleges and universities. Within these agencies a wealth of resources for small business owners exists. Additionally, organizations such as the U.S. Association of Veterans in Business and the National Veteran-Owned Business Association are available to provide workshops and conferences for veteran-owned businesses.

Earlier in this report, DVS recommended creation of a task force on veteran-owned businesses. DVS recommends that this task force work with veteran-owned businesses to explore their needs for educational programs, such as workshops and conferences, which address topics specific to veteran entrepreneurs. This exploration should encompass the needs of service-disabled veterans as well.

Mini-symposium on workforce development for disabled veterans

DVS held mini-symposium on April 26 for agencies to discuss their programs for disabled veterans. Participants included the Governor's Senior Advisor for Disability Issues and Concerns; Virginia Employment Commission—Disabled Veterans Outreach Program and Local Veterans Employment Representatives; Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU)—Rehabilitation and Research Training Center; Virginia Department of Transportation—Wounded Veterans Program; Department of Rehabilitative Services; Governor's Office for Workforce Development; Department of Human Resources Management, the U.S. Department of Labor; and TecAccess. The outcome of the mini-symposium is reviewed in more detail in the initiative detailing employment opportunities for veterans with disabilities.

Conference for Women Veterans

According to USmilitary.about.com, women make up 20 percent of today's military. But, this isn't the first conflict in which women have served. Approximately 33,000 women served during World War I; 350,000 served during World War II; 120,000 served during the Korean War; 265,000 were deployed during Vietnam; and 40,000 were deployed during Operation Desert Storm. Female veterans face their own unique issues; however, the role of women in the military is often overlooked and little attention has been devoted to their issues.

DVS supports the recommendation made by Ellen Dimming, a World War II WAVE and member of the Blue Ridge WAVES, to hold a conference where women veterans can come together and share their experiences, learn about benefits, express concerns, and discuss solutions. This would be an excellent opportunity to thank, bring attention to and serve an overlooked segment of Virginia's veterans.

A Dedicated Veterans Medical Resource at the Department of Health

Veterans are faced with a broad array of health issues unique to them. For example, a clear link exists between exposure to Agent Orange and diabetes. Veterans wounded in Iraq are coming back carrying strains of drug-resistant bacteria, acinetobacter, which has led to death in at least one case. Veterans who survive IED attacks often suffer spinal cord injuries or traumatic brain injuries. A recent study showed that combat-related head injuries are linked to an increased incidence of epilepsy in veterans. One in four suicide victims in Virginia is a veteran. And roughly one in three veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from post traumatic stress disorder, depression and other combat stress-related injuries.

DVS recommends placement of a dedicated medical professional in the Department of Health. This position will be responsible for increasing awareness about health issues specific to veterans in both the general public and within the medical community. This position will work within the health care community to improve treatment and health care delivery to veterans in both the public and private sectors. The position will advise the Department of Veterans Services and the Department of Health and other relevant agencies and organizations about emerging veterans' health issues. The position will also provide a valuable liaison between the VA medical centers in the Commonwealth, the state's academic university medical centers, and will serve as a key resource in efforts to plan, develop, and implement future veterans health care projects in Virginia.

Veterans Awareness Promoted Through Virginia's Museums

Virginia's museums offer a viable vehicle for raising awareness about veterans. This can be as simple as asking museums to display a table top poster and distribute brochures. However, using museums to raise awareness about veterans can become much more engaging by capitalizing on the unique expertise of each museum. For example, the Science Museum of Virginia could create an exhibit on the science behind some of the military technology used by our troops; the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts could do an exhibition on art created during periods of war. Given their creativity, museum staff will be more than able to come up with innovative and novel ideas for displays that relate to veterans and their military service.

These displays can be even more effective if all the exhibitions are displayed during the same time frame, for example between Memorial Day and Veterans Day. And, what better way to thank veterans than by giving those who visit the displays a discount on admission, a free exhibition catalog, a special showing, or something that conveys their special status and thanks them for their service and sacrifice.

Automated Comprehensive Direct Mail/Email Program to Virginia Veterans

In researching initiatives for this report, DVS repeatedly heard that veterans need better information about VA health and other benefits. Younger veterans may have received this information through the Transition Assistance Program (TAP); however, veterans who left the military prior to implementation of TAP in the early '90s do not know about the benefits that may be available to them. The spouses of veterans are even less informed about benefits that might be available to their partners or themselves. Further, members of the National Guard and Reserves usually do not participate in TAP and, therefore, miss an opportunity to learn about available resources and benefits.

Several barriers can be tackled that will improve communication with veterans. First, demographic and psychographic⁵ market research about veteran populations will help identify the needs and motivators of different subgroups within the overall veteran population. Second, the Commonwealth must be able to effectively identify veterans and systematically provide them with meaningful information.

The Virginia Department of Veterans Services (DVS) receives a copy of the DD214 (Report of Separation) for all military service personnel who list a Virginia address at the time of discharge. The forms are sorted by home address and sent to the appropriate benefit services office. Depending on resources, some offices mail a postcard to each veteran letting the person know about services provided by DVS. Recently, the agency hired a part-time employee to enter data from the DD214 into an Access database and send an initial letter to the veteran.

DVS recommends entering this data into an automated system and, ultimately, hopes to receive the data electronically from the Department of Defense. Capturing the data will create a database that DVS can use to create a long-term direct mail campaign to veterans.

DVS recommends creating a timeline of life events and mailing a letter or postcard to the veteran with the appropriate information associated with the life events timeline. For example, the agency could mail letters to veterans six months, 12 months, and 18 months after their discharge reminding them to take advantage of their remaining health care benefits. The agency could mail annual notices reminding veterans about their GI Bill benefits, noting the ten year limitation on the use of those benefits. As veterans reach middle age, letters could be sent reminding them about the state's veterans care centers and cemeteries. And, of course, all correspondence will include basic information about the agency and its services. Veterans will be encouraged to keep their addresses updated with DVS via an interactive address change on the website. They can also opt out of the mailing program on the website. Returned mail will be logged and the veteran's record will be deactivated to prevent further mailings. DVS could also verify information in its database against information in the Department of Motor Vehicles database to further ensure accuracy of names and addresses.

⁵ Characteristics of market segments based on attitudes, tastes and preferences.

With the appropriate use agreements protecting veterans' privacy, the database could be shared with other state agencies, such as the Departments of Social Services, Health, Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services, the Virginia Employment Commission, and the Governor's Office for Workforce Development so that they can provide pertinent information to veterans.

Although data collected for the veterans database would be limited to information provided on the DD214, it could be used to begin populating information for a claim should the veteran need to submit one in the future. And, with the development and maturation of automated information systems like No Wrong Door, the veterans database could become a valuable component of these systems.

DVS recommends exploring funding options for the technology and other costs required to create an automated comprehensive direct mail system. The system will need to be integrated with TurboVet and the Internet portal.

Veteran Indicator on Virginia-Issued Driver's Licenses and ID Cards

Another way to identify and communicate with veterans is by placing an indicator on Virginia-issued driver's licenses and ID cards that recognizes the holder as a U.S. military veteran. This indicator will be displayed on the driver's license/ID card and also will be captured on the customer's electronic DMV record. The veteran indicator in the DMV database will allow DVS to access names and addresses of veterans in order to conduct direct mail campaigns about issues relevant to veterans. These campaigns can be made even more effective by using demographic and psychographic⁶ research data to target specific populations and carefully craft the messages.

A customer requesting the veteran indicator would show the DMV customer service representative his or her DD214, military retiree ID card, or one of the other military-issued documents currently recognized by DMV. One of these documents would be sufficient evidence to add the indicator to the record. No further verification of the document or of veteran status will be required of DMV.

The veteran indicator on driver's licenses or ID cards will have an added benefit by providing an easy-to-recognize verification of an individual's status as a veteran. DVS envisions expanding the benefits available to veterans--benefits such as discounts to state parks, special seating at events, discounts at retail establishments, restaurants, hotels, etc. In fact, some of these benefits are already available to veterans; however, most have no easy way to verify a veteran's status.

DVS recommends that DVS and DMV explore options for placing a veteran indicator on the driver's license and ID cards to determine if this can be done administratively or if it requires legislation.

⁶ Characteristics of market segments based on attitudes, tastes and preferences.

Improved Veterans Communications Infrastructure

Dozens of resources are available to veterans and their family members through federal, state and local governments, non-profit organizations, veterans service organizations, and corporate programs. However, locating these services can be hit or miss. Even accessing services provided by the Virginia Department of Veterans Services (DVS) can be difficult since there is no central phone number or contact point.

Centralized Access to Resources Via the Internet

The initiative recommending an Internet portal for veterans addresses creating a centralized point of access where veterans and their families can find links to websites and resources. As described in this initiative, the portal will feature a robust search engine that will enable users to search for services and information. Additionally, an interactive screening tool will guide veterans in pinpointing the resources that they need. Ultimately, this portal could interface with the Virginia Department for the Aging's electronic No Wrong Door system and the Department of Social Service's Spyder software. These interfaces would share information submitted on the portal with the appropriate state agencies, thereby hastening the veteran's access to services.

Centralized Toll-Free Telephone Access to DVS

DVS has 23 benefit services offices, offices at two cemeteries, two veterans care centers, and administrative offices in Roanoke and Richmond; however, the agency lacks a centralized call center. Based on funding availability, the agency plans to establish a single toll-free number that will direct callers to the appropriate DVS office. The Department of Social Services has indicated that they have unused capacity in their phone center and this may provide an affordable opportunity to provide centralized, toll-free access for DVS.

Annual Face-to-Face Interaction with DVS

During March 2007, DVS conducted five veterans town hall meetings around the state. These events took DVS staff to the veterans and provided an opportunity for veterans to tell staff what is working and what needs improvement. The meetings provided informative feedback for the agency, increased visibility in the veteran community, and garnered media coverage for the agency. As one participant remarked, "there's no replacement for face-to-face interaction." Due to the positive response to these meetings, the agency plans to hold a similar series of meetings on an annual basis. Meeting locations may be changed; however, the agency will continue to hold meetings in each of the state's major regions.

Quality of Life Initiatives

Continuum of Service Model and No Wrong Door Philosophy

Military service personnel will reintegrate into their communities with varying levels of ease and success. While many may reintegrate successfully, others will experience challenges that can lead to additional medical and emotional issues, substance abuse, family dysfunction, encounters with law enforcement and possible incarceration and homelessness. For example, the Virginia edition of the national Violent Death Reporting System showed that nearly one-fourth of Virginia's suicide victims over age 18 were veterans. The Department of Corrections reports that 3,000 veterans are incarcerated in the state's correctional system. Recent point-in-time counts conducted by Virginia's Homeless Continuums of Care and by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimate that there are between 650 and 950 homeless veterans in Virginia.

Veterans are an easily identified population and exhibit a clear need for services that will help them return to and maintain an optimum quality of life. To ensure that veterans receive the assistance they need and deserve, the Commonwealth must create an enterprise approach that is based on a continuum of service structure and a no wrong door philosophy.

The needs of the veteran and his or her family must be addressed holistically and as a continuum—from immediate and emergency needs for shelter and acute medical care to intermediate needs for rehabilitative medical care, individual and family counseling, and job training, to long-term assistance such as housing loans, maintenance-level therapy and other forms of assistance. With a no-wrong-door approach, no matter where the veteran first touches state government, he or she will be evaluated in terms of the continuum of service model and assisted with obtaining needed services from other state agencies.

For example, a veteran may be seeking employment; however, the individual may also need vocational rehabilitation, housing assistance, mental health services or other assistance that will increase the individual's success in both finding and maintaining employment. With the continuum of service model and a no wrong door approach, the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) counselor working with the veteran would complete a simple assessment of the veteran which would identify other needs. The counselor could then provide the veteran with contact information for these other services and help schedule interviews with the appropriate service providers, as well as assist the individual with employment services. Similarly, if the veteran first approached a local Community Services Board (CSB) for assistance with mental health or substance abuse problems, the representative at that agency would assess the veteran in terms of the continuum of service model, provide contact information for other services and provide the requested treatment or referral to treatment services.

DVS met with the Department of Social Services (DSS) and the Virginia Department for the Aging (VDA) to explore potential shared resources and partnerships. As noted earlier, DSS is

developing an electronic system (Spyder) that will enable DSS workers to determine if an individual is already known to the agency as well as to obtain information electronically about the individual from the Department of Motor Vehicles and the Social Security Administration. Both DSS and VDA expressed interest in building veteran-related questions into some of their intake tools such as the Uniform Assessment Instrument, a screening tool that the state uses to determine an applicant's eligibility for adult services.

VDA also expressed interest in including DVS in a later phase of their No Wrong Door approach for adult services. This is a collaborative public/private effort among the VDA, Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS), Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS), DSS, DMHMRSAS, SeniorNavigator (a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization), pilot Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), their local governments, and local providers. As described in the initiative about an Internet portal, the electronic component of the No Wrong Door system will collect the Uniform Assessment Instrument. In addition, the system is being designed to maintain a directory of service providers used to coordinate the best available services for clients, track referrals and service delivery, coordinate services, measure outcomes, and evaluate gaps in service.

DVS plans to continue the dialog with DSS and VDA for inclusion in their electronic programs. The agency recommends using symposiums to bring together decision-makers from state agencies and other organizations to develop a continuum of service model and no wrong door philosophy. These symposiums are described in detail in the initiative recommending symposiums.

Task force to Study Best Practices in Other States and Make Recommendations for Virginia

Best practices in the provision of benefits and services for veterans are emerging across the country. The goal of DVS is to become one of the top states in the U.S. in the provision of services to veterans. Some of the initiatives that DVS plans to explore are:

- In Pennsylvania, community leaders, veterans service organizations, employers and educators, including the University of Pittsburgh's Department of Rehabilitation Science and Technology are working together to form the Pennsylvania Disabled Veterans Rehabilitation/Vocational Retraining Project to determine the readjustment needs – physiological, psychological, vocational and employment of returning veterans and to provide assistance.
- Kentucky is exploring ways to partner with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to extend skilled nursing care to residents of veterans nursing homes. In addition, Kentucky plans to maximize the college tuition waiver for eligible family members of veterans and the state is developing opportunities for homeless veterans to become employable and obtain suitable employment.
- Illinois has recently expanded its existing line-of-duty benefits, initially created for police officers and firefighters, to include families of soldiers killed in the Global War on Terror. The state has also established a tax incentive for employers to hire veterans. Employers can earn an income tax credit of up to \$600 annually for every qualified veteran hired after January 1, 2007. The credit is available for veterans who were members of the Armed Forces, the Armed Force reserves, and the National Guard on active duty in Operation Desert Storm, Operation Enduring Freedom, or Operation Iraqi Freedom.
- Wisconsin created a new Wisconsin G.I. Bill tuition program for veterans and for the spouses and children of veterans who die in the line of duty or who are left significantly disabled as the result of their military service. In addition, the state created a Veterans and Surviving Spouses Property Tax Credit for qualifying elderly veterans and their unmarried surviving spouses.
- Both Illinois and Wisconsin have created Trust Funds allowing the families of Guard members and reservists to receive emergency financial grants and general financial support, helping to make up the decline in household income that occurs when a wage-earner is called up to service. In Wisconsin, the Veterans Trust Fund supports and finances the Department of Veterans Affairs. The agency provides home loans and personal loans to veterans. Interest from the loans operates the state agency.
- Other initiatives may include the development of health and long-term care insurance programs for veterans who do not qualify for veterans benefits, tax waivers, strengthened consumer and human rights protections, educational benefits, tax incentives for veteran-owned businesses, programs to address post-traumatic stress disorder, and innovative solutions to many other needs of veterans and their families.

DVS recommends establishment of a broad-based task force to examine innovations across the

country. DVS proposes partnerships with one or more universities to conduct the required veteran-specific research and analyses. Task force membership will include representatives from the Board of Veterans Services, Joint Leadership Council, Veterans Foundation, veterans service organizations, state agencies, the VA, local government agencies and departments of veterans services in other states. Task force representatives will recommend the necessary legislative, policy, funding and private sector initiatives to establish and support innovative programs across Virginia.

Provision of Behavioral Health Care Services by State Resources

From all accounts the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is overwhelmed with the demand for short-term and long-term health care for veterans of previous wars and those returning from the Global War on Terror in Iraq and Afghanistan. Recent news of problems with Walter Reed Army Medical Center have led to nationwide concerns about the VA's ability to adequately assess returning veterans for pressing medical needs, including mental health and substance abuse problems and risk of suicide.

DVS is working with the VA to expand and expedite health care services in Virginia through the implementation of the Federal Veterans Benefits, Health Care, and Information Technology Act (S.3421) enacted in December 2006. This Act requires the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to ensure that each community-based outpatient clinic of the VA has the capacity to provide or monitor the provision of mental health services to enrolled veterans who, as determined by the Secretary, are in need of such services. Mental health services must be provided through either (a) a community-based outpatient clinic of the VA by an employee of the VA, (b) referral to another facility of the VA, (3) contract with an appropriate mental health professional in the community, or (4) by telemental health services, also known as telepsychiatry.

A study conducted at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research revealed that one in eight military personnel returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder or some other mental illness during the first year post deployment. The results have been reported in the Journal of the American Medical Association and are based on a study of computerized medical records of 300,000 soldiers. They are thought to be the most accurate indicator to date of the percentage of soldiers requiring mental health services. Stress disorders often take months or years to appear, and the strong upsurge in roadside bombings and other attacks by insurgents in Iraq will only increase the demand for services. Other reports and news article indicate that as many as 34 percent of veterans may need mental health services.

Six cities in Virginia rank among the top ten U.S. cities with the highest representation of veterans according to the Military Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Veteran Affairs. (See Table 1)

**Table 1
 Top Ten U.S. Cities with the Highest Representation of Veterans***

Place	# of Veterans	% of Veterans
Hampton, Virginia	28,312	27.1%
Clarksville, Tennessee	15,319	24.4%
Fayetteville, North Carolina	19,060	23.7%
Virginia Beach, Virginia	60,260	21.7%
Colorado Springs, Colorado	51,609	20.2%
Norfolk, Virginia	30,068	19.9%
Newport News, Virginia	24,021	19.9%
Columbia, Georgia	24,984	19.6%
Chesapeake, Virginia	25,621	18.9%
Portsmouth, Virginia	12,955	18.4%

* Population > 100,000

In addition, more than 1,535 soldiers of the Virginia Army National Guard have been mobilized in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

DVS has entered into discussions with the VA, the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services (DMHMRSAS) and the Virginia Association of Community Services Boards (CSBs) to develop an on-going contractual relationship for referral of veterans to the CSB services system for treatment for mental health and substance use disorders. A presentation is scheduled in late May 2007 to outline the concept to the Executive Leadership Council of the VA Mid-Atlantic Health Care Network—VISN 6.

The proposed approach will enhance the VA's capacity to provide services to veterans and take advantage of an existing network of service providers. A number of issues and barriers need to be discussed and resolved in order to make this a workable proposal for a seamless system of referrals. However, if an effective collaboration can be established, the potential gains are significant. Such collaboration could result in increased enrollment in the VISN-6 Health Care System, increased community outreach to Reserve units and the National Guard, increased mental health and substance abuse services in high density areas, increased outreach in rural areas, and compliance with state and federal mandates for services.

DVS proposes that over the next year, DVS, DMHMRSAS, the CSBs and representatives of VISN 6 work together to develop a Memorandum of Understanding that will allow the VA to contract through DMHMRSAS for the CSBs to provide on an as-needed basis mental health and substance abuse services to enrolled veterans. The target population to be served will be veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. It is proposed that initially, this project be piloted with at least three CSBs: one large urban CSB potentially in the Tidewater area where the greatest influx of returnees will occur; another in a mid-sized CSB; and one in a small rural area that could also take advantage of telepsychiatry. Ideally, the locations of the pilots would correspond with the three existing VA medical centers in Hampton, Richmond and Salem.

An on-going relationship with the VA will open up many opportunities to address accessibility and availability of mental health and substance abuse services to veterans across the Commonwealth. The long-term goals of this partnership will be to develop seamless service connections with the CSB system, access and connections for Reserve and National Guard returnees, and to address other issues specific to veterans.

The University of Virginia ranks high among Virginia's medical resources and, like the Community Service Boards, can provide premier treatment for Virginia's veterans in the areas of primary, tertiary, and rehabilitative health care. The University recommends developing contractual healthcare benefit packages that will enable the UVA Medical Center to serve as a provider of preventative care and other critical services that are backlogged at VA facilities in Virginia.

The University also offers extensive specialty programs for treatment and therapy of numerous disorders such as traumatic stress, pain management, sleep disorders, alcohol and drug dependency, and smoking dependency. UVA programs have been developed through extensive clinical research and offer effective healthcare services with proven outcomes. The programs are already in place and would only require resources to reimburse for professional and technical services rendered.

DVS recommends further discussions with the University of Virginia and, if appropriate, will facilitate discussions between UVA and the VA to evaluate the feasibility of UVA as a service provider.

Implementation of the Heroes to Hometowns Program in Virginia

Heroes to Hometowns (H2H) is a Department of Defense program that brings together representatives from the state departments of veterans services, the American Legion and the National Guard to connect with and support injured service members and their families before they return home. This program coordinates help from state, federal, non-profit and corporate resources to ensure a smooth transition from hospital to civilian life.

Components of the H2H program include:

- Organizing welcome home celebrations
- Assisting with temporary and permanent housing
- Assisting with adapting a home or vehicle
- Finding jobs and educational opportunities
- Carpools for hospital visits
- Childcare
- Financial support
- Transportation
- Entertainment
- Counseling
- Spiritual support
- Family support

Virginia already has some programs in place that can support H2H. The Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA) provides assistance in home adaptations for wounded veterans through the Granting Freedom program. DVS and DRS, VEC, and TecAccess have initiated a training and employment program for disabled veterans (DVETS). The National Guard Family Assistance Centers provide a broad range of services to the families of National Guard members. Veteran service organizations may be willing to provide carpools, transportation and other types of assistance. And, professional organizations of ministers or an association of military chaplains may be willing to provide spiritual support.

DVS recommends forming a committee with representatives from DVS, the American Legion, and the National Guard to explore how Virginia can fully participate in Heroes to Hometown. Exploration will include examining H2H and similar programs in other states; developing partnerships among state agencies and VSOs, and identifying roles and responsibilities to ensure that Virginia mobilizes its communities to execute the components of the Heroes to Hometown program.

VCU Veterans Center

Virginia Commonwealth University proposes developing a Veterans Center that will provide life skills training, employment training and job opportunities, and training for mental health professionals about veteran-specific issues and treatment strategies. Additionally, the center will conduct research and host conferences on veteran-related issues.

Estimates indicate that as many as one in three veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq suffer from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or some form of combat stress injury. However, many more veterans and their family members may need assistance with simply reintegrating into their communities.

Veterans returning from deployment report the following readjustment issues:

- Physical—dealing with traffic and crowds, being unarmed, having unlimited access to alcohol and some drugs;
- Cognitive—not knowing how much to tell family or friends, loyalty conflicts, boredom;
- Emotional—Withdrawal from the rush of battle, feeling unsafe or helpless;
- Social—Being separated from friends and leaders, being misunderstood by family; and
- Spiritual—Difficulty making sense of what has happened, feeling guilty, having conflicting values.

Families need help as well. Spouses express the need for help in saving or improving their marriages or explaining to children why their father or mother is different than they were prior to serving overseas. Some spouses want to know how to help the returning veteran, but many have expressed a desperate need for help themselves or for their children. When surveyed about their treatment preferences:

- 54% reported wanting groups for themselves,
- 20% educational programs for themselves,
- 19% individual therapy, and
- 13% couples therapy

Many veterans are reluctant to talk to mental health professionals, especially ones at the VA, because of the stigma associated with seeking help and the potential damage to their careers. Many veterans feel that they are not understood because VA staff have not served in a combat zone or been removed from their families, careers, or workplace for a year or more.

VCU proposes developing and implementing statewide programs such as the Life Skills Center's FREE 4 VETS (Family, Relationship, Education, and Employment) program to assist veterans and their families with post-deployment readjustment and reintegration into their communities. FREE 4 VETS is a psycho-educational program rather than an illness-oriented treatment approach that builds on veterans' strengths rather than their problems. It does not conflict or duplicate the VA's efforts to serve veterans with PTSD or other psychopathology.

FREE 4 VETS uses the expertise of veterans from prior wars to serve as peer coaches. The program provides veterans and their families with skill-based resources, such as dealing with stress and repairing and enhancing relationships. These are all resources that veterans and family members can do at home; however, a toll-free number staffed by Life Skills Center employees will be available to help veterans and family members. FREE 4 VETS also proposes an additional component to help veterans re-enter the work world through education or employment that takes advantage of their leadership experiences and other skills learned during combat.

Capitalizing on the University's faculty and programs in the health sciences, the Veterans Center could also provide training for mental health professionals about veteran-specific issues and treatment strategies, and conduct research and host conferences on veteran-related issues. Ultimately, the Center will serve as the hub for dissemination, training, and evaluation of efforts to assist returning veterans and their families with the difficult task of reintegration into their communities.

Service Delivery to Incarcerated, Homeless, and Hospitalized Veterans

While most veterans successfully reintegrate into their families and communities, some are unable to make the transition and eventually become incarcerated or homeless. Veterans hospitalized due to combat injuries or who become hospitalized for other reasons may also need assistance with the transition from hospital to home. The Department of Corrections reports that 3,000 veterans are incarcerated in Virginia's correctional system. Recent point-in-time counts conducted by Virginia's Homeless Continuums of Care and by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimate that between 650 and 950 veterans in Virginia are homeless.

Currently, the Virginia Department of Veterans Services (DVS) does not have a systematic, statewide program for providing services to incarcerated, homeless or hospitalized veterans. However, earlier in 2007, the agency hired a part-time staff person to establish and coordinate outreach programs to veterans in need.

Veterans in the state's correctional facilities do not have access to DVS benefit services representatives or, for security reasons, to the Internet. Although a few currently receive limited benefits which will increase once they are released, most do not have a connection with DVS and may miss benefits to which they are entitled and which could be of great value to them when they transition back into their communities.

DVS proposes establishing an outreach and education program for the inmates of Virginia's 40 major correctional facilities and field units. Annually, DVS benefit services representatives will visit each of these facilities and present a two-part program to incarcerated veterans. The first part will provide information about veterans benefits and regulations governing access to these benefits while a veteran is incarcerated, information about his or her family's access to the benefits, as well as information about access to benefits upon release. The second half of the program will provide individual assistance to veterans who wish to file a claim. The programs will be promoted at each facility well in advance so that inmates will have time to get the documents required for completing a claim (such as the DD214, medical records, and personal information).

One obstacle that must be overcome to assist incarcerated veterans in filing a claim for a service-connected disability is the need for the veteran to have a medical exam that meets U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) requirements. The purpose of the medical exam is to determine the veteran's current level of disability and/or connection to the veteran's military service. The results of the medical exam are used by the VA to determine if the condition is service-connected, and, if so, the level of disability. DVS will need to work with the Department of Corrections to arrange for the required medical examination before any rating decision can be made by the VA.

The agency proposes partnering with the Prison Re-entry Coordinator for Richmond Goodwill Industries. The person in this position conducts presentations at Department of Corrections

Reception Centers and is interested in including information for veterans in these presentations. The agency will explore the possibility of similar partnerships with other Goodwill Industries in Virginia.

DVS recommends developing a partnership with the Virginia Inter Agency Council on Homelessness (VIACH), Virginia's Homeless Continuums of Care, the VA, and Virginia's veterans service organizations (VSOs) to develop a new, integrated model for serving Virginia's homeless veterans.

- DVS will develop a strengthened continuum of care for homeless veterans that will work to better connect homeless veterans to the many services available to them.
- DVS will work with Virginia's homeless providers to better coordinate the submission of applications for federal grant funding.
- Through a pilot project, DVS plans to demonstrate the feasibility of using volunteer case managers – recruited from Virginia's VSOs – to provide the vital glue that will link services to the homeless veteran.

DVS recommends development of a similar approach for providing outreach and education for hospitalized veterans. The Heroes to Hometowns initiative, discussed earlier in this report, addresses support for severely injured veterans as they transition from a hospital setting to their community. DVS will schedule an initial meeting with the Commissioner of the Department of Rehabilitative Services and the Director of McGuire VA Medical center to discuss the development of a continuum of care for wounded and disabled service members and veterans as they move from military medical centers to VA medical centers and back to their communities of residence. The goal of this partnership will be to develop a seamless continuum of care for veterans currently residing in Virginia and those returning home from the Global War on Terror.

Operation Greenscape

DVS and Department of Forestry held an initial meeting to discuss a partnership between the two agencies. Department of Forestry staff can provide expertise in guiding the agency in landscaping the care centers and cemeteries, especially in ways that follow sound conservation practices. The agencies are exploring ways to enrich the landscaping at the Virginia Veterans Cemetery in Amelia, the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery in Suffolk, and the SitterBarfoot Veterans Care Center in Richmond. Under consideration are enhancement of nature trails in the cemeteries, and landscaping around the catch-basin at the SitterBarfoot Veterans Care Center.

DVS recommends additional meetings with the Department of Forestry to develop a landscaping plan for DVS facilities.

Veteran-Specific Hunting/Fishing Programs

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) has proposed several exciting initiatives that will offer new, expanded, or customized services to veterans. The Department of Veterans Services (DVS) believes these programs will be especially well received, given that many veterans are also avid hunters and fisherman. Some of these new initiatives proposed by DGIF require further research and discussion to determine feasibility, costs, and benefits, while other initiatives can be pursued within current resource levels.

DGIF proposals include:

- The DGIF volunteer Hunter Education cadre, numbering approximately 700, includes numerous veterans. This program is a great opportunity for veterans who are hunters/outdoorsmen to get involved proactively in promoting the sport, mentoring youth, and ensuring safety. Veterans with disabilities would be welcomed. Through the “Guide” program, volunteer instructors are partnered with first time hunters to create a positive hunting experience and to instill the tenets of safe, responsible, ethical hunting. This program is available to any veteran who choose to be a mentor, or to disabled veterans who require one-on-one assistance in hunting.
- Hosting a pilot workshop at the Virginia Outdoor Sportsman’s show in August to have agency and industry representatives talk to disabled veterans about adaptive equipment for hunting and about hunting opportunities for disabled veterans
- Working with Fort Pickett to develop a hunting program for disabled veterans
- Working with the Wheelin’ Sportsmen organization, which is part of the National Wild Turkey Federation, to develop new opportunities
- Working with the Virginia Department of Forestry and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation to identify new hunting opportunities for disabled veterans
- Including links and information on DGIF programs via the web and other communication vehicles to newly separated service personnel and to disabled veterans
- Establishing an advisory committee of disabled individuals to help DGIF consider better ways to improve physical and programmatic access to DGIF programs and facilities and how to outreach to DGIF partners
- Veteran involvement in fishing clinics, particularly those clinics where veterans can interact with Virginia’s youth and serve as instructors
- Better dissemination of information on DGIF facilities and programs, with an emphasis on

access for the disabled

- A direct link from the DVS website to the DGIF website to better educate veterans about the many programs offered by DGIF
- A one-year gift subscription to Virginia Wildlife and/or the Wildlife Calendar for newly separated service-members (funding would need to be provided for either of these items)
- Developing/hosting outdoor skills classes for veterans (funding required)
- Partnering with DVS facilities (care centers and cemeteries) and VA medical facilities to promote the DGIF Wildlife Mapping program
- Habitat Improvement Projects – guidance, and possibly volunteer assistance from the Master Naturalist program, can be provided for DVS facilities or for the veterans hospitals to make wildlife habitat improvements, either in conjunction with wildlife observation programs (as described above) or as separate programs at veterans cemeteries and other properties

Real Estate Tax Exemption for Veterans with 100 Percent Disability Rating

The Code of Virginia, §58.1-3210, provides that the “*governing body of any county, city or town may, by ordinance, provide for the exemption from, deferral of, or a combination program of exemptions from and deferrals of taxation of real estate and manufactured homes as defined in § 36-85.3, or any portion thereof, and upon such conditions and in such amount as the ordinance may prescribe.*” Such exemptions are available for persons “*at least sixty-five years of age or if provided in the ordinance, anyone found to be permanently and totally disabled.*”

§58.1-3211 sets restrictions and conditions on any exemption provided by the localities. These restrictions include 1) income restrictions, and 2) financial worth restrictions. The restriction on income applies to the owner and any of his/her relatives living in the dwelling, while the restriction on financial worth applies to the owner and his/her spouse.

Notwithstanding the income and financial worth restrictions, localities – if they offer the real estate tax exemption at all – are able to set lower eligibility limits than the caps set by the state. Conversely, some localities may wish to allow exemptions at higher income or financial worth levels, but are restricted from doing so by the state caps.

As of September 2006, there were 6,401 veterans in Virginia receiving compensation from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for a service-connected disability at the 100 percent level – i.e. a total disability. If single, each of these veterans would receive \$29,652 a year from the VA for his/her service-connected disability. If married, he/she would receive \$31,320 per year.

Disabled veterans and their spouses are caught in something of a Catch-23. If neither the spouse nor the veteran work, they must live off only the veteran's VA compensation and any other supplemental forms of income. In this case, the family may qualify for the real estate tax exemption, provided such a benefit is offered by their local government and that such government's eligibility levels are at or below the state cap.

Alternatively, if the disabled veteran and/or his/her spouse seek employment, and the income from that employment puts them over the income and/or financial worth caps set by the state (or a lower cap if set by the local government), then the veteran and his/her spouse would have a higher living and, presumably, enjoy a higher standard of living, but would not qualify for the real estate tax exemption.

Some members of the veterans community feel that veterans with a 100 percent service-connected disability (i.e. those who are totally disabled) have earned, through their service and sacrifice, the right to a real estate tax exemption, regardless of income or financial worth.

Given the relatively small number of Virginia veterans with a 100 percent service-connected disability rating – 6,401 – the Department of Veterans Services recommends that the Code of

Virginia be amended to provide a real estate tax exemption for these veterans, regardless of income or financial worth.

Veteran-Specific Research

Accurate and in-depth research is essential to ensure the efficacy of Virginia's programs and services for veterans and to ensure that programs are achieving the objectives for which they were designed.

The following bullets illustrate just a few research topics in the area of employment. Many topics can be identified in other areas such as health care and quality of life.

- Market/demographic research to determine how many members transition out of the military in Virginia each year. Such research could help in understanding what the veteran population in Virginia looks like, their ages, family members, whether they have disabilities, etc.
- Research regarding employment that could determine the military members' ages, skills and military occupational specialties. It would also be helpful to determine how many veterans find employment, in what period of time, whether or not they are able to utilize their military experience, whether the civilian jobs that they return to are an improvement over their job levels prior to military service, whether they pursued an education following service, etc.
- Other areas of inquiry could include determining how well business cultures and military cultures mesh. What is the degree of disconnect for veterans going from a military culture into the private sector? What difficulties do civilian employees face in trying to manage former military personnel? What are the specific employment needs and issues for veterans with disabilities? What are the training needs and demands of employers who want to hire veterans, but who do not have the necessary resources?
- The Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) database could be good source of basic statistical information about veterans, such as age, gender, skill levels or job classification, service branch, discharge date, disability, and classification.
- What is the unemployment rate for veterans in Virginia?

Additional research topics will be identified as new programs are developed and existing programs are enhanced. DVS recommends that the task forces recommended in this report identify the most pressing needs for research and that DVS contract with universities throughout the state to conduct this research.

Next Steps

Implementation of the initiatives presented in this report will require on-going attention to detail and cooperation of many public and private entities. DVS plans to hire a staff person dedicated to overseeing and administering the implementation of the EO 19 initiatives. As a first step, DVS staff will develop strategies that set out the activities required for implementation, responsible parties, resources required, timelines and performance measures. These strategies will be dynamic; e.g., the strategies must be constantly updated to account for tracking progress, next steps, changes in personnel and responsibilities, addressing barriers to meeting performance measures, and ensuring the availability of adequate resources. Pages 51 through 57 of this report include charts outlining each initiative's progress to date and next steps. The initiatives are categorized as short-term, those where work has already begun or that can be initiated in the next one to two years, and long-term, those that will require additional research, relationship building, examination and identification of resource requirements.

The next steps that DVS must develop for implementation of the EO 19 initiatives include:

1. Determining administrative actions that can be initiated in the short-term and those that will require long-term efforts. These actions include additional Executive Orders, policy revisions, regulatory revisions, development of guidelines, etc.
2. Developing legislative and budget initiatives.
3. Developing timelines and staff responsibilities for implementation.
4. Developing clear performance measures.
5. Developing long-range strategies for continued implementation and sustainability.

In addition, since Executive Order 19 requires all state agencies to identify opportunities to partner with DVS on ways to offer new, expanded, or customized services for Virginia's veterans, further implementation of many of the projects in this report will depend on the capacity and resources of other state agencies. It is essential that DVS continue to work with and to build relationships with state agencies to successfully carry out the initiatives and to jointly advocate for changes in policy, administrative guidelines, legislation and resource allocation.

For the near term, DVS will work with the Governor's Office, the Office of the Secretary of Public Safety, the Department of Planning and Budget and the General Assembly to develop and pass a comprehensive legislative and budget package for the 2008 Session of the General Assembly. The table on page 58 outlines DVS's recommended priorities for administrative, legislative and budget actions in the 2008-2010 biennium.

Summary of EO 19 Initiatives By Short- and Long-term Priority

The following chart categorizes the initiatives in this report by defining them as immediate, short-term, and long-term endeavors. Initiatives defined as short-term can be started within the next one to two years, provided resources are available. Work has already begun on nine of these initiatives. Only a few initiatives fall into the long-term category, and these are initiatives that will require two to five years to start up.

Initiative	Actions
Short-Term (one to two years) * indicates that work has begun on the initiative	
*TurboVet	Present status: The agency has developed a Request for Proposal for a demonstration pilot of TurboVet.
	Next steps: DVS anticipates award of a contract for a demonstration pilot by the end of May 2007 and completion of the demonstration project by mid-summer. The agency anticipates release of a request for proposal for system analysis and development of the full TurboVet product by the end of September 2007.
*Upgrade the DVS Technology Infrastructure	Present status: DVS is currently consolidating the Representative Veterans Database (RVD) system into a single Microsoft SQL server platform. The agency has initiated a pilot project to digitize and electronically store hard copy documents and correspondence. And, agency staff members are exploring the state's Learning Management System for use in delivering DVS training materials.
	Next steps: DVS expects completion of the RVD consolidation project during the second or third quarters of 2007. Digitization of records in the pilot office should be completed by mid May and the agency will evaluate the success of the conversion and select a second office for conversion. DVS personnel are planning on obtaining further training in use of the Learning Management System and will develop a timeline for development of an LMS training program by early summer.

*Employment Opportunities for Veterans with Disabilities	Present status: MOU signed with TecAccess to identify, train, and employ 16 disabled veterans within the next 12 months. Mini-symposium with multiple state agencies was held to discuss existing programs and explore options for the future.
	Next steps: TecAccess proposes ramping up the program to provide training specific to the personnel needs of individual companies. Continue dialog between agencies with existing programs and develop a strategic plan for future enhancements.
*Increased Advocacy for Veterans	Present status: This is an ongoing effort that must be incorporated in everything the agency does; however, the agency has already taken on initiatives that will benefit veterans as a group, such as facilitating provision of behavioral health care by state resources to fill the gap in what the VA is able to provide.
	Next steps: DVS will continue dialogs that have already begun and will develop a mechanism for systematically identifying veterans issues and communicating these issues to the Governor, legislators, members of Virginia's Congressional delegation, and the VA.
*Increased Awareness Among State Agencies About Veterans issues and Service	Present status: DVS has distributed bookmarks for distribution by a number of other state agencies. Within the very near future, the agency will follow up with brochures and desktop posters for agencies to use.
	Next steps: Expand distribution of brochures to additional state agencies and hold conferences for state employees to learn about and develop solutions to veterans issues.
*Symposiums on Veteran-Related Issue	Present status: DVS has agreed to partner with the Addiction Technology Transfer Center to co-host a symposium on post traumatic stress disorder.
	Next steps: Identify partners, plan and hold a seminar for state agency personnel, and workshops and symposiums on issues of interest to veteran-owned businesses and women veterans.

*Automated Comprehensive Direct Mail/Email Program	Present status: DVS has begun entering data for recently discharged veterans into an Access database and will mail an initial letter summarizing the services that the agency provides.
	Next steps: To truly make this an effective program, DVS will need to identify and procure robust technology to accommodate name and address records for thousands of veterans and host an automated electronic mailing program. The agency will also need to develop messaging that will effectively address veterans' information needs over their lifetimes. These future steps may place this initiative in the long-term category.
*Implementation of the Heroes to Hometowns Program in Virginia	Present status: Initial meetings are being held with Department of Defense, American Legion, National Guard, and DVS to discuss the components of this program and the benefits, challenges, and roles associated with implementing it in Virginia.
	Next steps: Continue discussions, seek funding and other resources, and recruit veteran service organizations and community leaders to participate.
*Service Delivery to Incarcerated, Homeless, and Hospitalized Veterans	Present status: DVS has hired an employee to conduct outreach to incarcerated, homeless, and hospitalized veterans. The agency has developed a plan for systematic outreach and service to incarcerated veterans.
	Next steps: Develop and implement plans for systematic outreach and service to homeless and hospitalized veterans.
Integrated Workforce Development	Present status: DVS has held initial discussions with the Governor's Office of Workforce Development, the VEC, and other partners on ways to integrate government and private workforce programs into a seamless system that will better serve our veterans
	Next steps: DVS will work with partner agencies to create a one-stop system for workforce development for veterans and their spouses and dependents

Awareness Campaign for Employers	Present status: No action to date.
	Next steps: Get detailed information from ESGR about the 5-Star Employer Program, and develop a partnership with <i>HireVetsFirst</i> program in order to develop a campaign plan, estimate of resources, and timeline for implementation.
Veterans Hiring Preference in State Government	Present status: DHRM is developing guidelines for state agencies to implement the new veterans preference law that becomes effective July 1, 2007
	Next steps: DVS will work with DHRM and the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (JLC) to develop guidelines. DVS proposes placing a part-time position with DHRM to assist DHRM in implementing and promoting veterans preference in state government
Outreach to Veteran-Owned Businesses and Potential Entrepreneurs	Present status: DVS has had informal discussions with small business owners on issues of concern
	Next steps: Create Veteran-Owned Business Advisory Council (VOBAC). Charge VOBAC with developing ways state government can partner with veteran-owned businesses regarding procurement, job creation and hiring, and workforce development.
Implement and Review Virginia's Legislation for Service-Disabled, Veteran-Owned Small businesses	Present status: DVS is working with DMBE on a plan to implement the provisions of SB1145
	Next steps: DVS proposes placing a position at DMBE to assist in implementation of SB1145 and to work with DMBE on ways to facilitate the participation of service-disabled, veteran-owned small businesses in the state procurement process
Dedicated Veterans Medical Resource at the Department of Health	Present status: DVS has held initial discussions with VDH on the placement of a dedicated resource at VDH to monitor, address, and promote veterans health issues
	Next steps: Work with VDH to further refine scope of responsibility of new position. Write position description and identify the financial resources necessary to fill position. Request funding and position authorization.
Veterans Awareness Promoted Through Virginia's	Present status: An initial discussion was held with the Director of the Science Museum of Virginia.

Museums	Next steps: Follow up with the Science Museum as well as other museums to initially request that they display DVS information for veterans. Longer-term propose to museums the idea of creating veteran-focused displays.
Improved Veterans Communications Infrastructure	Present status: Initial dialog has begun about tapping into electronic systems being developed by the Departments of Social Services and Aging and the DVS conducted five successful town hall meetings across the state in early 2007.
	Next steps: Continue research and dialog to develop an Internet portal. Explore the possibility of using capacity within the Department of Social Services phone center to establish a DVS toll-free number and phone center. Institutionalize a series of annual town hall meetings.
Task Force to Study Best Practices in Other States and Make Recommendations for Virginia	Present status: DVS has identified a few best practices in other states.
	Next steps: Develop a charge and appoint task force members to research and develop recommendations for Virginia.
Provision of Behavioral Health Care Services by State Resources	Present status: DVS has initiated discussion with VA Mid-Atlantic Health Care Network-VISN 6, DMHMRSAS and VACSB. DVS, DMHMRSAS and VACSB scheduled to present concept for partnership to Executive Leadership Council of VAMC in late May.
	Next Steps: Development of agreement and negotiations for contractual relationship. Goal to begin pilots for service provision early 2008.
Operation Greenscape	Present status: An initial meeting was held with the Department of Forestry to explore partnership opportunities.
	Next steps: Continue the dialog with the Department of Forestry

Veteran-Specific Hunting/Fishing Programs	Present status: DVS has held initial discussions with DGIF officials on ways to tailor DGIF programs for veterans, and on potential new DGIF programs that could be offered for veterans
	Next steps: DVS will work with DGIF to identify the financial and staffing resources necessary to implement the new initiatives.
Veteran-Specific Research	Present status: Data about veterans issues as well as their demographic and psychographic characteristics is needed to improve service to them.
	Next steps: Identify specific research needs and work with Virginia universities to have this research conducted.

Long-term (two to five years)	
Internet Portal	Present status: Dialog begun with Departments of Social Services and Aging about tying into their systems
	Next steps: Exploration of technology needed and further dialog with other state agencies to determine opportunities and resource requirements
Veteran Indicator on Virginia-Issued Driver's Licenses and ID Cards	Present status: A proposal has been created and presented to DMV staff for review.
	Next steps: Continue the dialog with DMV and submit a formal proposal to the DMV commissioner.
Continuum of Service Model and No Wrong Door Philosophy	Present status: Initial dialog has begun with other state agencies about their roles in serving veterans, and ideas for an integrated service model have been discussed with the Departments of Social Services and Aging.
	Next steps: Continue dialog with individual agencies plus host symposiums for state agency personnel and also on specific topics that will enable agency decision makers and subject matter experts to realize the gains achieved through a continuum of service model and no wrong door philosophy and develop solutions.
VCU Veterans Center	Present status: VCU has created a proposal and sought funding during the 2007 General Assembly Session.
	Next steps: Prepare a more detailed strategic proposal that spells out services provided through the Center, resource needs, and anticipated outcomes.
Real Estate Tax Exemption for Veterans with 100 Percent Disability Rating	Present status: No action taken to present
	Next steps: Request that the Department of Planning and Budget or the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission study this issue to determine the fiscal impact to the cities and counties of providing this benefit. If fiscal impact is small, secure support of veterans groups and identify a legislator willing to sponsor the legislation.

2008-2010 Administrative, Legislative and Budget Actions

Administrative Priorities

- Integrated Workforce Development: Taskforce
- Taskforce on Employment Opportunities for Veterans with Disabilities
- Veterans Priority Designation within State Workforce. Implementation of DHRM Guidelines on HB 2840 and SB 1033, 2007. Inclusion of state agency template for hiring veterans with disabilities.
- Taskforce on Veteran-Owned Businesses and Potential Entrepreneurs.
- DVS Continued Outreach to State Agencies through presentations, distribution of materials, and collaboration.
- Symposiums on Veterans-Related Issues.
- Town Hall Meetings in major regions of the Commonwealth.
- Taskforce on Best Practices
- Heroes to Hometowns Committee
- Outreach to Incarcerated, Homeless and Hospitalized Veterans through partnerships with the Department of Corrections, Prison Re-entry Coordinator for Richmond Goodwill, Virginia Inter-Agency Council on Homelessness, Virginia's Homeless Continuums of Care, VA and Veterans Service Organizations.
- DVS and Department of Forestry partnership on Operation Greenscape
- DVS and Department of Game and Inland Fisheries partnership on Veteran-Specific Hunting/Fishing Programs
- DVS partnership with DMHMRSAS and Community Services Boards to expand VA resources for behavioral healthcare and substance abuse services.
- DVS partnership with UVA to develop medical and specialty healthcare services for veterans.
- DVS partnership with DRS and McGuire VA to develop a seamless continuum of care for wounded/disabled service members and veterans as they move from military medical center to VA medical centers to the community.

Legislative Priorities

- Develop a joint legislative and budget package with the Board of Veterans Services, the Joint Leadership Council, the Virginia Military Affairs Council, the Citizen Soldier Support Council, and Virginia National Guard and any other relevant partners and stakeholders to address veterans needs for active duty members of the military and members of the Nation Guard and Reserves.
- Amend the provisions of SB 1145, 2007, governing service-disabled, veteran-owned small businesses (SDVOSBs) to align Virginia's definition of service disability for SDVOSBs with the definition used in the federal guidelines.
- Amend the *Code* to authorize Veteran Indicator on Virginia Driver's License.
- Amend § 58.1-3210 of the *Code* to create a real estate tax exemption for veterans with 100% disability rating.

Budget Priorities

Technology Requests

- Turbo Vet resources for statewide implementation
- Resources to upgrade DVS Technology Infrastructure
- Funding for Veterans Database from Information of DD214

Training Requests

- Learning Management System
- Funding for veterans related conferences, training, symposiums
- Other Training Needs

Hire Vets First Campaign and Other Public Awareness Campaigns

- Budget request for Public Relations Funding and incentives for public relations firms' involvement.

Other State Agency Resource Requests

- DOH Budget for Dedicated Veterans Medical Resource
- VCU Veterans Center
- UVA Contract for Healthcare Benefits and Specialty Services

Appendix 1—Executive Order 19

Executive Orders 2006

Executive Order 19 (2006)

Serving Virginia's Veterans
Importance of Veterans' Services

For almost 400 years, Virginians have defended our great nation and Commonwealth. Today, the Commonwealth is home to 744,000 veterans who served the cause of freedom in war and in peace, at home and abroad. Our Commonwealth owes a great debt to the brave men and women and their families who answered liberty's call and protected all that we hold so dear, and it is only right that our Commonwealth do all that it can to ensure that our veterans and their families receive the benefits, support, quality care, and recognition they have earned through service and sacrifice.

Veterans accounted for almost \$6 billion in direct federal spending in Virginia in 2004. Expenditures by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs on compensation and pension benefits, health care, cemetery services, and construction totaled \$1.8 billion, while the U.S. Department of Defense paid \$4 billion in retirement pay to Virginia's veterans. Capitalizing on available federal funding not only benefits our veterans, but is a good for Virginia's economy.

Directives for Serving Virginia's Veterans

By virtue of the authority vested in me as Governor under Article V of the Constitution of Virginia and under the laws of the Commonwealth, including but not limited to, Chapter 1 of Title 2.2 and Section 2.2-2100 of the Code of Virginia, I hereby set forth the Commonwealth's policy for improving services to Virginia's veterans.

- I hereby direct the Commissioner of Veterans Services to prepare a comprehensive report on the status of current Commonwealth programs and services that are either offered exclusively to veterans or are tailored to the specific needs of veterans. The report shall identify opportunities for improving services and shall address the continuum of care needs of disabled veterans. An interim report shall be prepared by October 15, 2006, and a final report shall be completed by April 30, 2007. All executive branch agencies shall work with the Commissioner of Veterans Services to assist as requested.
- I hereby direct all state agencies to identify opportunities to partner with the Department of Veterans Services on ways to offer new, expanded, or customized services that meet the educational, health care, and social service needs of Virginia's veterans. Agencies will identify the resources required to implement the new, expanded, or customized services for veterans and will report such requirements to the Commissioner of Veterans Services no later than April 30, 2007.

- I hereby direct the Department of Veterans Services, working with all appropriate state agencies, to give special attention to opportunities for improving services to disabled veterans, including all aspects of the continuum of care and service delivery.
- I hereby request the Board of Veterans Services and the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations to jointly develop legislative proposals to be considered by the Governor for introduction in the 2007 General Assembly. Such proposals shall be submitted to the Governor's Office no later than September 30, 2006.
- I hereby direct the Commissioner of Veterans Services and the Veterans Services Foundation to continue to give high priority to efforts to obtain federal grants, private contributions, and other resources for improving services to veterans in Virginia.
- I hereby direct all state agency heads to renew their commitment to veterans' preference in hiring.

Effective Date of the Executive Order

This Executive Order rescinds Executive Order 40 (2002) issued by Governor Mark R. Warner. This Executive Order shall be effective upon its signing and shall remain in full force and effect until June 30, 2010, unless amended or rescinded by further Executive Order.

Given under my hand and the Seal of the Commonwealth of Virginia, this 16th day of June, 2006.

/s/ Timothy M. Kaine, Governor

Attest:

/s/ Secretary of the Commonwealth

Appendix 2—Executive Order 19 Interim Report

**Virginia Department
of Veterans Services**

**Executive Order 19
Serving Virginia's Veterans**

Interim Report

October 15, 2006

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Current State Agency Services to Virginia's Veterans

As citizens of the Commonwealth of Virginia, veterans have access to the state services available to the general population. This section outlines those state services available exclusively to veterans or targeted to the specific needs of veterans.

Listed below are the state agencies serving veterans, the secretariats to which the agencies are assigned, and the services provided by those agencies. The Department of Veterans Services is listed first, with other state agencies grouped by secretariat.

- Department of Veterans Services (Secretary of Public Safety)
 - Lead veterans services agency in state government
 - Four service delivery areas: benefit services, care center services, cemetery services, and education services
 - Benefit Services – Assists veterans and eligible dependents in accessing federal and state veterans benefits through claims development and representation
 - 28 Veterans Service Representatives (31 by end of FY07)
 - 20 Field Offices: Accomac, Alexandria, Big Stone Gap, Bristol, Cedar Bluff, Charlottesville, Danville, Fairfax, Front Royal, Hampton, Lynchburg, McGuire VAMC, Norfolk (2 offices), Quantico, Richmond, Roanoke, South Hill, Staunton, and Wytheville
 - New offices will open in Hampton, Portsmouth, and Salem in FY07
 - 20,424 claims filed in FY06
 - Care Center Services – Delivers skilled nursing and domiciliary care to veterans
 - Virginia Veterans Care Center
 - 240-bed facility in Roanoke
 - 93% average occupancy rate – 234 of 240 beds
 - Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center (under construction)
 - 160-bed facility in Richmond
 - Scheduled opening – Summer 2007
 - 40-bed addition planned
 - Hampton Roads Veterans Care Center – in the early planning stages
 - Cemetery Services – Provides honorable burial and memorial services to veterans
 - Virginia Veterans Cemetery (Amelia) – 231 burials in FY06
 - Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery (Suffolk) – 478 burials in FY06
 - Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery – in the early planning stages

- Education Services – Certifies that post-secondary educational institutions meet G.I. Bill funding and eligibility requirements, enabling veterans to use their G.I. Bill benefits to pursue educational opportunities
 - Over 750 institutions certified
 - Certified institutions include universities, colleges, community colleges, trade schools, vocational programs, and licensure certification programs
 - In Federal Fiscal Year 2005, 19,982 veterans were awarded educational benefits worth \$165.7 million

- Virginia War Memorial (Secretary of Administration)
 - On the soaring glass and marbles walls of the Virginia War Memorial are inscribed the names of over 11,600 Virginians who gave their lives in defense of freedom during World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Gulf War

 - The Virginia War Memorial also seeks to teach the children of Virginia of the sacrifice and service of Virginians during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. This is accomplished through displays at the Memorial and through the Virginians At War series – video programs and classroom materials founded on the real-life wartime experiences of Virginians and their participation in events that changed history

- Department of Human Resource Management (Secretary of Administration)
 - Responsible for administering, developing, and overseeing the Commonwealth's human resource management system

 - Provides veterans seeking employment with access to information about available services and assistance

 - Through the DHRM Veterans Outreach Council
 - Operates an active recruitment program that targets the employment of qualified veterans in state government
 - Works to enhance the exchange of information between veterans and state agencies that will facilitate the employment of individuals currently being discharged from the military and those with prior military service
 - Participates in career fairs targeted toward military personnel

 - Veterans preference in state government

- If a veteran applies for employment with the Commonwealth that is based on the passing of any written examination, the veteran's grade or rating on such examination is increased by five percent. If the veteran has a service-connected disability rating fixed by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, his grade or rating shall be increased by 10 percent on such written examination
 - If any veteran applies for employment with the Commonwealth that is not based on the passing of any examination, such veteran's military service is taken into consideration by the Commonwealth during the selection process, provided that such veteran meets all of the knowledge, skill, and ability requirements for the available position. Additional consideration is given to veterans who have a service-connected disability rating fixed by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
- Virginia Employment Commission (Secretary of Commerce and Trade)
 - Promotes economic growth and stability by delivering and coordinating workforce services
 - Serves Virginia veterans through the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) and Local Veterans Employment Representative (LVER) Program
 - Specifically focused on veterans employment and outreach
 - 38 DVOP and 40.5 LVER specialists work at VEC offices statewide
 - Provides Transition Assistance Program (TAP) services at eight military bases
 - Targets personnel separating from the military
 - Three-day workshop that teaches job search and interview skills
 - Serves over 15,000 future veterans a year
 - Registered 35,824 Virginia veterans in FY06
 - Helped 20,775 Virginia veterans secure employment in FY06
 - Virginia Housing Development Authority (Secretary of Commerce and Trade)
 - Administers the Granting Freedom Program
 - Grant program that pays for modifications to make living spaces more accessible for servicemen or women who sustained injury during service in a combat theatre of operations
 - Funds can be used to widen doorways and add ramps to make a home wheelchair accessible, to install grab bars in a bathroom, or to make other

- modifications designed to improve a home's accessibility and functionality
 - Currently, over \$1 million of funding is available to pay for modifications to houses and apartments
 - The maximum award available for each dwelling unit is \$4,000
 - Offers VA loans as part of 30-year fixed rate home loan program for first-time homebuyers
 - Provides home ownership education classes on military bases (open to active duty and veterans)
- Department of Housing and Community Development (Secretary of Commerce and Trade)
 - Point in Time (PIT) counts put the number of homeless veterans in Virginia between 600 and 900. Through grants, DHCD supports homeless shelters that serve homeless veterans
 - The Governor's Housing Conference 2006 will feature a workshop on meeting the needs of homeless veterans. Sponsored by the Virginia Inter-Agency Council on Homelessness, the session will focus on the resources available to organizations seeking to meet the housing and service needs of homeless veterans
- Department of Education (Secretary of Education)
 - Offers the Virginia Veteran Honorary High School Diploma to recognize the life experiences of veterans who were unable to complete their high school education because of service in the armed forces during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War
 - Since the first honorary diplomas were issued in 2001, more than 1,000 have been awarded to veterans of the three wars
- Library of Virginia (Secretary of Education)
 - The Virginia World War II Separation Notices collection contains approximately 250,000 notices for World War II veterans who were discharged between 1942 and 1950 (with the bulk between 1944 and 1946) and were seeking employment in Virginia
 - For some veterans, these notices may be used as proof of service to access veterans disability and health care benefits

- Virginia's Public Colleges and Universities (Secretary of Education)
 - Through the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program, waive tuition and required fees for qualified spouses and dependents

- Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (Secretary of Natural Resources)
 - Offers the “Virginia Resident Disabled Veteran’s Lifetime State License to Hunt and Freshwater Fish in Inland Waters” for \$10
 - Offers the “Virginia Resident Disabled Veteran’s Lifetime State License to Trap” for \$10

- Marine Resources Commission (Secretary of Natural Resources)
 - The Disabled Resident Lifetime Saltwater Fishing License is available to certain disabled veterans for \$5

- Department of Motor Vehicles (Secretary of Transportation)
 - Offers 33 military/veteran themed license plates, with four plates in development

- Virginia Department of Transportation (Secretary of Transportation)
 - Through the VDOT Wounded Veteran Program, offers disabled veterans internship positions that are designed to help the veterans gain skills relevant to employment in the public or private sectors

Opportunities for improving current services to Virginia's veterans, and for partnering with the Department of Veterans Services to offer new, expanded, or customized services

The Department of Veterans Services (DVS) has entered into initial discussions with over a dozen state agencies on ways to improve current services or to offer new, expanded, or customized services. Before the process is complete, DVS expects to open discussions with a dozen additional agencies.

Broadly speaking, efforts to improve current services or to identify new, expanded, or customized services fall into five categories:

1. In-depth, resource-intensive services that address the continuum of care needs of disabled veterans
 - a. Such services would capitalize on the expertise and service capacity of current state agencies and facilities
 - b. To address this category of service, DVS has had initial discussions with state agencies that include the Department of Rehabilitative Services, the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse Services, and Virginia Commonwealth University
2. New benefits and services
 - a. Such services could be provided to targeted groups of veterans (disabled veterans, homeless veterans, etc.) or to the veterans population at large
 - b. To address this category of service, DVS has had initial discussions with state agencies that include the Department of Military Affairs and the State Council on Higher Education for Virginia
3. Referrals to/from other state agencies
 - a. Such services would serve to link Virginia's veterans with the broad range of services provided by other state agencies, and would help make Virginia's veterans aware of the services provided by the Department of Veterans Services
 - b. To address this category of service, DVS has had initial discussions with state agencies that include the Department for the Aging (SeniorNavigator.org), the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse Services, the Department of Rehabilitative Services, the Department of Social Services, the Virginia Employment Commission, and the Secretary of Technology
4. Ways to recognize veterans for their service to our nation and Commonwealth
 - a. Such recognition would serve as an everyday reminder to veterans that the Commonwealth of Virginia recognizes the service and sacrifice they made in defense of freedom

- b. To address this category of service, DVS has had initial discussions with state agencies that include the Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Department of Forestry, and the Department of Motor Vehicles

- 5. Partnerships with state agencies to assist the Department of Veterans Services with the business operations of the Department
 - a. Such partnerships would assist DVS in operating more efficiently as an enterprise, thereby enabling the Department to better serve Virginia's veterans
 - b. To address this category of service, DVS has had initial discussions with state agencies that include the Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Department of Forestry, the Department of Motor Vehicles, the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse Services, and the Department of Rehabilitative Services

Appendix A: Executive Order 19

SERVING VIRGINIA'S VETERANS

Importance of Veterans' Services

For almost 400 years, Virginians have defended our great nation and Commonwealth. Today, the Commonwealth is home to 744,000 veterans who served the cause of freedom in war and in peace, at home and abroad. Our Commonwealth owes a great debt to the brave men and women and their families who answered liberty's call and protected all that we hold so dear, and it is only right that our Commonwealth do all that it can to ensure that our veterans and their families receive the benefits, support, quality care, and recognition they have earned through service and sacrifice.

Veterans accounted for almost \$6 billion in direct federal spending in Virginia in 2004. Expenditures by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs on compensation and pension benefits, health care, cemetery services, and construction totaled \$1.8 billion, while the U.S. Department of Defense paid \$4 billion in retirement pay to Virginia's veterans. Capitalizing on available federal funding not only benefits our veterans, but is a good for Virginia's economy.

Directives for Serving Virginia's Veterans

By virtue of the authority vested in me as Governor under Article V of the Constitution of Virginia and under the laws of the Commonwealth, including but not limited to, Chapter 1 of Title 2.2 and Section 2.2-2100 of the Code of Virginia, I hereby set forth the Commonwealth's policy for improving services to Virginia's veterans.

- I hereby direct the Commissioner of Veterans Services to prepare a comprehensive report on the status of current Commonwealth programs and services that are either offered exclusively to veterans or are tailored to the specific needs of veterans. The report shall identify opportunities for improving services and shall address the continuum of care needs of disabled veterans. An interim report shall be prepared by October 15, 2006, and a final report shall be completed by April 30, 2007. All executive branch agencies shall work with the Commissioner of Veterans Services to assist as requested.
- I hereby direct all state agencies to identify opportunities to partner with the Department of Veterans Services on ways to offer new, expanded, or customized services that meet the educational, health care, and social service needs of Virginia's veterans. Agencies will identify the resources required to implement the new, expanded, or customized services for veterans and will report such requirements to the Commissioner of Veterans Services no later than April 30, 2007.

- I hereby direct the Department of Veterans Services, working with all appropriate state agencies, to give special attention to opportunities for improving services to disabled veterans, including all aspects of the continuum of care and service delivery.
- I hereby request the Board of Veterans Services and the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations to jointly develop legislative proposals to be considered by the Governor for introduction in the 2007 General Assembly. Such proposals shall be submitted to the Governor's Office no later than September 30, 2006.
- I hereby direct the Commissioner of Veterans Services and the Veterans Services Foundation to continue to give high priority to efforts to obtain federal grants, private contributions, and other resources for improving services to veterans in Virginia.
- I hereby direct all state agency heads to renew their commitment to veterans' preference in hiring.

Effective Date of the Executive Order

This Executive Order rescinds Executive Order 40 (2002) issued by Governor Mark R. Warner. This Executive Order shall be effective upon its signing and shall remain in full force and effect until June 30, 2010, unless amended or rescinded by further Executive Order.

Given under my hand and the Seal of the Commonwealth of Virginia, this 16th day of June, 2006.

/s/ Timothy M. Kaine, Governor

Attest:

/s/ Secretary of the Commonwealth

Appendix 3—DVS Fact Sheet

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS SERVICES FACT SHEET

Mission: To serve Virginia's veterans and their beneficiaries by ensuring they receive the benefits, support, quality care, and recognition they have earned through service and sacrifice

Leadership: Commissioner Vincent M. Burgess

Key State-Operated Services

- Benefit Services – Assists veterans and their dependents in claims for veterans benefits
 - 31 Veterans Service Representatives
 - 21 Field Offices: Accomac, Alexandria, Big Stone Gap, Bristol, Cedar Bluff, Charlottesville, Danville, Fairfax, Front Royal, Hampton, Hampton VAMC, Lynchburg, McGuire VAMC, Norfolk, Quantico, Richmond, Roanoke, Salem VAMC, South Hill, Staunton, and Wytheville
- Care Center Services – Delivers skilled nursing and domiciliary care to veterans
 - Virginia Veterans Care Center
 - 240-bed facility in Roanoke
 - 93% average occupancy rate – 234 of 240 beds
 - Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center (under construction)
 - 160-bed facility in Richmond
 - Scheduled opening – Summer 2007
 - 40-bed addition planned
 - Hampton Roads Veterans Care Center – in the early planning stages
- Cemetery Services – Provides honorable burial and memorial services to veterans
 - Virginia Veterans Cemetery (Amelia) – 231 burials in Fiscal Year 2006
 - Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery (Suffolk) – 478 burials in FY06
 - Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery – in the early planning stages
- Education Services – Certifies that post-secondary educational institutions meet G.I. Bill funding and eligibility requirements, enabling veterans to pursue educational opportunities. Over 750 institutions certified

DVS Resources

Service Area	FY07 Budget	FY07 Positions
Benefits	\$3,657,466	58
Care Centers	\$15,626,998	305
Cemeteries	\$682,631	14
Education	\$627,859	7
Administration	\$1,594,755	18
DVS Total	\$23,189,709	402

Key Veterans Facts

- 737,600 veterans in Virginia (#11 in U.S.)
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Impact
 - 14% of Virginia veterans receive VA benefits
 - FFY2006 VA Expenditures in Virginia: \$1.97 billion (#10 in U.S.)
 - Disability compensation and benefits: \$1.13 billion (#8 in U.S.)
 - Health Care and Construction: \$601 million (#16 in U.S.)

- Education and Vocational Rehabilitation: \$142 million (#6 in U.S.)
- Other: \$97 million (#9 in U.S.)
- U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) Retired Military Pay
 - FFY2005 DoD Retiree Pay to Virginia veterans: \$3.5 billion (#3 in U.S.)
 - Represents 9.9% of total DoD retired military pay

Appendix 4—Town Hall Meetings Summary Report



Virginia Department of Veterans Services

Town Hall Meetings Summary Report

Prepared by:

*Virginia Commonwealth University
Office of Public Policy Training
Center for Public Policy within the*

L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs

Virginia Department of Veterans Services Town Hall Meetings Summary Report

Agency Overview

The Virginia Department of Veterans Services (DVS) was established in 2003. Prior to 2003, veterans services in Virginia were fragmented among the former Department of Veterans Affairs, which operated the benefits and cemeteries programs; the Virginia Veterans Care Center, which was operated by a series of contractors under the supervision of a Board of Trustees; and the Department of Education, which oversaw the activities of the State Approving Agency for Veterans Education.

The Department of Veteran Services is organized into four service delivery branches – benefits, cemeteries, care centers, and veterans' education – and an administrative section. Integral components of the Department of Veterans Services' team are the three board-type entities – the Boards of Veterans Services, the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations, and the Veterans Services Foundation, that work collaboratively to support the effective delivery of services to Virginia's veterans.

The Benefit Services section assists veterans of the armed forces and their dependents in obtaining entitlement benefits from the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs. In addition to the services offered at the section headquarters in Roanoke, the Benefit Services section operates 19 field offices throughout the Commonwealth, with two additional field offices scheduled to open in the near future.

Virginia's veterans cemeteries provide burial and perpetual care services to veterans and eligible dependents. The Virginia Veterans Cemetery, in Amelia, is a 129-acre facility. The Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery, in Suffolk, is a 73-acre facility.

The Virginia Veterans Care Center, located adjacent to the Salem VA Medical Center, is a 240-bed facility that provides long-term skilled care and assisted living services to veterans of the armed forces. The 160-bed Sitter- Barfoot Veterans Care Center, located adjacent to the McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, is expected to be complete before the end of 2007.

The State Approving Agency (SAA) for Veterans Education reviews and approves post secondary education programs operating in the Commonwealth, ensuring the programs meet strict federal qualification guidelines. Veterans may only use their G.I. Bill and other educational benefits at programs approved by the SAA.

Background

The Virginia Department of Veterans Services conducted town hall meetings in response to Governor Kaine's Executive Order 19. This executive order directs DVS and other state agencies to improve services to the state's veterans, especially disabled veterans.

DVS identified four primary areas of focus:

1. Outreach and communication with Virginia's veterans: How can we reach veterans and what information do they need and want?
2. Quality of life for all veterans: What are the needs of veterans, especially in terms of health care, services from state government agencies, and outreach to veterans who are homeless, incarcerated, or hospitalized?
3. Workforce development: How can we ensure that employment opportunities are available to veterans and how can we ensure that the private sector has access to the veteran labor pool. What can we do to assist veteran-owned businesses?
4. Technology: How can we use technology to communicate with and deliver services to veterans?

Meeting Overview

Meetings were held at Abingdon, Fredericksburg Richmond, Roanoke, and Suffolk between the dates of March 1 and March 15. Each meeting was conducted after 6 pm and was scheduled for two hours.

DVS prepared and distributed flyers announcing dates, times and locations for the five regional town hall meetings. Announcements were sent electronically to all DVS benefits offices, Veterans Affairs offices in Virginia and veterans service organizations for distribution. A total of one hundred forty five people attended the sessions and included representatives from state and federal agencies, veterans service organizations (VSOs), nonprofit organizations, retired and active servicemen and women and spouses of veterans.

Each participant received a handout explaining the meeting purpose, the four primary areas of focus and an overview of the meeting process (see Appendix A).

Each session gathered information concerning:

1. What currently works well in delivering state government services to veterans and what are the best practices in place?
2. What are the critical barriers to serving veterans and what are the most important issues facing veterans?

3. Recommendations for future action to improve state government services to veterans.

DVS staff attended each meeting to help answer participant questions. Each meeting was facilitated and documented by faculty from Virginia Commonwealth University's (VCU) Office of Public Policy Training. Participant comments were captured using easels and large flip charts.

Preparation of the Summary Report

VCU staff prepared summary reports for each session documenting participant comments. Comments were organized to indicate what is currently working well to meet veteran's needs; critical barriers to be addressed; and recommendations for action.

Upon completion of the sessions, all comments were transcribed and grouped by VCU staff into similar categories to identify key messages. This report provides a description of issues and recommendations that resonated among all five sessions as well as issues that were unique to specific regions.

Issues and Recommendations

Each town hall meeting focused on soliciting comments about current DVS services and how the agency could better address veteran's needs. Participants discussed DVS services but the majority of comments concerned services provided by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

What Currently is Working Well to Meet Veteran's Needs

Each meeting began with a discussion of what was working well to meet the needs of Virginia's veterans. The discussions were short-lived as it became evident that the participants were more interested in discussing unresolved issues and making recommendations for changes. Some positive comments were voiced.

Assistance in filing and tracking claims. Participants who contacted DVS for help in filing and tracking claims voiced appreciation for the assistance provided. They noted that staff were informed and helpful and provided a valuable link to the VA that helped them gain needed information and benefits.

Communicating with veterans using a variety of methods. A variety of avenues are being used to provide information to veterans on relevant issues and opportunities. DVS and VA websites, and their associated links to other organizations, are useful methods for gaining information on veteran benefits for those who have internet access.

Emails, direct mail, newspaper articles, and newsletters and telephone calls from veteran service organizations are also effective communication methods.

Medical facilities and services for veterans. Several participants expressed satisfaction with medical and mental health services provided by VA hospitals and outpatient clinics. The DVS Virginia Veterans Care Center was noted for its effective provision of skilled nursing home services. Participants close to facilities and clinics noted the convenience of access.

State government support for veterans. Several participants expressed appreciation for state government hiring preferences for veterans, especially those who are disabled. State agencies are also supportive when members of the National Guard or Reserves are called up for active duty. The Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) and Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) have dedicated staff and programs to assist veterans, including those with disabilities. Executive Order 19 indicates that veterans are a state priority.

Transition Assistance Program (TAP). The TAP program, initiated by the military in 1991, provides valuable information to military personnel shortly before they return to civilian life. The VEC actively participates in TAP sessions on military bases and DVS contributes information and assistance as well.

Education benefits. Education benefits provided to veterans and their dependents through the GI Bill were cited as a valuable benefit. This assistance helps individuals gain education and training assistance and improves their ability to gain employment and support themselves and their families.

Critical Issues to be Addressed

Several critical issues were voiced consistently across the five town hall meetings:

Poor understanding of DVS and its services. Most participants indicated they were unaware of DVS and the services that it provides. The majority of participants attended the meeting because they thought it was an opportunity to express their concerns regarding VA services and policies. DVS has been in existence for only four years and it is clear that many veterans are unaware of its existence and how it might benefit them.

Difficulty in getting information to all veterans. It is difficult to provide information to all of Virginia's veterans. Veterans who left the military before 1991 did not have access to the TAP program. Veteran service organizations provide information to their members but younger veterans typically are not members. Local branches of veteran services organizations do not have ready access to names and contact information of veterans in their areas which hampers outreach efforts.

Participants indicated the TAP program has improved access to information but noted that many veterans are so anxious to return home that they do not process all the information that they receive. There is no scheduled follow-up six to twelve months later to provide additional information.

Few state benefits for veterans. Participants noted that Virginia had the fourth highest number of residents who were veterans among all states but ranked near the bottom in state benefits provided. Participants indicated that other states provided veterans with a variety of tax breaks and incentives and reduced fees for licenses and state-provided services.

Long waiting period for VA claims processing. Considerable frustration was voiced regarding the long wait to receive a response from the VA when a claim is submitted. DVS staff currently informs claimants they should expect a twelve month wait for most responses due to a high backlog on unprocessed claims at the VA. One participant indicated that it has taken him seven years to have his appeal heard regarding the rejection of his benefit claim. Extended delays place undue stress on veterans and their families, many of whom have no other recourse due to lack of insurance or other factors.

Confusing VA policies and procedures. Participants reported VA policies and procedures are very confusing and difficult to understand. Several instances were cited concerning contradictory decisions being made by VA staff on the same claim depending upon individual interpretations of policies. Access to services is sometimes denied due to individual or family income limitations. Veterans and their families view these limitations as unfair and would prefer to have access tied to years of military service, not income.

Federal agencies define disability in different ways and utilize different standards for determining access to assistance. Several veterans voiced dissatisfaction with VA policies regarding medical exams for claims to increase disability benefits. A medical exam is required by a doctor the veteran has not seen before and the medical opinion provided by the patients' regular doctor can be overruled.

VA policies and procedures are complex and ever changing. It is difficult for DVS staff to keep abreast of changing regulations and procedures. New DVS claim agents require several years of training and experience to reach their full capacity to assist veterans.

Inappropriate time periods for claims coverage. Veterans must file a claim within two years of leaving military service or their claim will be automatically denied. Participants indicated that it is quite possible for a legitimate service-related medical or mental health need to surface after two years.

Inadequate medical facilities and services for veterans and their families. Many veterans, especially older veterans, are totally reliant on the VA for medical and mental health services. These veterans either are unable to afford private insurance or unable to get coverage due to preexisting conditions.

Some veterans expressed satisfaction with medical and mental health services provided through VA facilities but many participants voiced concerns regarding the quality of provided services. Some veterans indicated they experienced long waits within VA facilities due to inadequate staffing or equipment breakdowns. Frustration was expressed concerning the minimal amount of time most patients spent with a doctor due to demands on the physician's time or the delivery of services by other medical personnel, such as nurse practitioners.

Veterans who do not live within close proximity of the major VA medical facilities experience long travel times to access services. Veterans in rural areas do not have access to public transportation and transportation by ambulance is not always reimbursed by the VA. Few outpatient clinics exist in rural localities. Counseling services and support groups for veterans and their family members are especially difficult to obtain in rural areas.

Proximity to a VA facility does not always assure ready access to needed services. Participants at the Roanoke session indicated it was not uncommon for a patient to arrive at the VA hospital and be deferred to another medical facility due to a lack of staff or beds. Those arriving at the VA hospital by ambulance indicated it was difficult to receive reimbursement for transportation costs when deferred to another facility.

Concern was expressed regarding the ability of the VA system to meet the needs of veterans who served during the Gulf wars, in Afghanistan and Iraq. An already burdened health care system may not be able to respond adequately to a growing number of veterans needing care. Many young veterans are returning with significant injuries resulting from explosions who will require long-term therapy and employment assistance. It was also noted that there is an increasing number of women veterans which have different needs that must be met.

Inadequate access to medical records and information. Participants indicated that it was very difficult, if not impossible, to gain access to their complete medical records when requested. Privacy regulations prevent the sharing of information with other medical facilities and personnel. Several participants indicated that their military service information and/or medical records were lost and it was extremely difficult for them to complete all the steps necessary to gain access to VA services and benefits. Concern was expressed by some veterans that their electronic records may not be secure.

Confusing GI Bill education benefit policies. Several participants at the Richmond meeting voiced frustration concerning education benefits. Money provided to veterans

for tuition was regarded as income by college and university financial aid offices and reduced the amount of financial assistance provided by those institutions. In some instances, veterans were required to reimburse institutions who provided financial aid after the institutions were informed the student was receiving GI Bill education benefits.

Recommendations for Action

Several recommendations were offered that were similar across all five meetings:

Increase DVS visibility and awareness. DVS services are not adequately recognized by veterans, their family members and survivors. DVS should increase its education and outreach efforts across the state through partnerships with state and local veteran service organizations, the TAP program, the National Guard and Reserves, and other relevant organizations. DVS should also send information directly to all returning veterans after they return home. Increased DVS visibility will result in the need for additional highly skilled and experienced benefits agents.

The internet can be a powerful tool for DVS and other agencies for outreach and education, especially for younger veterans. DVS and other web pages should be advertised to raise awareness about their availability and use. Organizations should ensure that their web pages are linked to other veteran service agencies and organizations and sources of information of interest and use to veterans.

Periodic newsletters, e-mails and newspaper articles can be effective methods for increasing awareness of DVS services and informing veterans and their families about relevant issues.

Increase outreach efforts for returning veterans. The TAP program is useful but is inadequate to meet the needs of returning veterans by itself. Returning veterans should be contacted at regularly scheduled intervals after their return to civilian life and provided information on available benefits and services. Participants indicated contact at approximately six months and twelve months after they return home would be useful.

DVS should develop a database of Virginia's veterans, especially younger veterans. Contact information for returning veterans should be provided to local VSOs to enable them to conduct outreach to veterans in their localities.

Improve communication and linkages between federal, state and local organizations and military facilities. Federal, state and local organizations should continue to build effective working relationships with one another and increase linkages and partnerships with military facilities. Each organization should have knowledge of and ready access to information about other relevant organizations to provide to veterans who contact them. This knowledge and information would increase the ability of agency staff to refer veterans and their families for appropriate assistance. The VEC, DVS, Social Security Administration and other governmental agencies should establish automatic referral systems for veterans who contact them.

Virginia is one of the few states that do not have a Federal Women's Coordinator and the state should request that one be created. Benefit coordinators and family

assistance counselors should be available at all National Guard armories for referrals and assistance.

Stronger linkages should be established between local and regional providers of medical and mental health services and state veteran's agencies and VSOs. Community Services Boards, nonprofit organizations and other community-based groups can provide a valuable link to services that can supplement services provided through the VA.

DVS, VEC and other state agencies providing assistance to veterans should partner to provide veteran benefits seminars and presentations at local VSOs, National Guard armories, military bases and other locations convenient to veterans and their families.

Establish a 1-800 number that veterans and family members can use to gain access to information and referrals for services.

Increase state veteran's benefits. Virginia should expand the range and amount of benefits it provides to veterans. The state should consider reduction or elimination of common fees (re: driver or hunting licenses) and taxes.

State hiring preferences for veterans should be retained and expanded, especially for disabled veterans. The state should explore the feasibility of creating support groups for veterans in state employ.

The state should partner with the military to establish credentialing programs that recognize military training and experience. For example, a veteran with training and experience driving large military vehicles would be automatically eligible to apply for a commercial driver's license. Colleges and universities could establish standards and procedures that would provide credit hours toward degrees for relevant military training. Financial assistance provided through the GI bill for education should not be considered income by higher education financial aid offices.

DVS should increase the number of veteran's cemeteries across the state. Additional state operated veteran care centers should be built to provide skilled nursing home services.

Increase state advocacy for veterans. DVS should play a more important advocacy role for Virginia's veterans. DVS can provide a link between VSOs and other state agencies to gather information on veteran's needs, identify gaps in services and propose plans of action.

DVS should continue to work closely with the Joint Leadership Council to address veteran's needs. DVS should also support the efforts of the Governor to work with other states and national organizations to improve federal responses to veteran's needs.

Expand career development assistance. Increase efforts to encourage employers to hire veterans, especially disabled veterans. Provide education benefits and job training and assistance to spouses of disabled veterans to help them gain employment.

Eliminate the backlog of VA claims. The VA needs to eliminate the backlog of claims that is creating intolerable waiting periods for those who are eligible to receive veteran's benefits. Paperwork and procedures should be simplified to help speed up the claims process for applicants as well as claims reviewers.

DVS should increase its ability to help veterans appeal denied claims and find affordable legal representation when appeals are heard.

Increase access to VA services and facilities. Existing VA medical facilities should increase their capacity to meet the medical and mental health needs of Virginia's veterans and their families. Support for family members of returning veterans should be increased to help them and the veteran transitioning back into civilian life.

The VA should increase the availability of services in rural areas through outpatient clinics to reduce long travel times for veterans and their family members. Utilize local VSO buildings or other community facilities to provide support groups that can meet at times that are convenient for veterans and their family members, such as evening and weekends.

Increase access to information. Veterans should be able to gain access to all of their non-classified military and medical records upon request.

Appendix A

Virginia Department of Veterans Services

900 East Main Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219
www.virginiaforveterans.com

Veterans Town Hall Meeting

The Virginia Department of Veterans Services (DVS) is holding this town hall meeting in response to Governor Kaine's Executive Order 19. This executive order directs DVS and other state agencies to improve services to the state's veterans, especially disabled veterans.

DVS has identified four primary areas of focus:

5. Outreach and communication with Virginia's veterans: How can we reach veterans and what information do they need and want?
6. Quality of life for all veterans: What are the needs of veterans, especially in terms of health care, services from state government agencies, and outreach to veterans who are homeless, incarcerated, or hospitalized?
7. Workforce development: How can we ensure that employment opportunities are available to veterans and how can we ensure that the private sector has access to the veteran labor pool. What can we do to assist veteran-owned businesses?
8. Technology: How can we use technology to communicate with and deliver services to veterans?

Session Overview

Our primary objective today is to gather as much information as possible on the following:

4. What currently works well in delivering state government services to veterans and what are the best practices in place?
5. What are the critical barriers to serving veterans and what are the most important issues facing veterans?

Serving Virginia's Veterans

6. Recommendations for future action to improve state government services to veterans.

Serving Virginia's Veterans

Ground Rules

The discussion process used during this meeting is designed to be productive and maximize everyone's participation – but we need your help to make it work. The following ground rules will ensure that each of you is able to share your views and be heard in a respectful, meaningful way:

- A. Each person's perspective has value – listen and speak respectfully
- B. It is all right to disagree – people's experiences differ – but not be disagreeable
- C. Be as specific as possible in your comments – we want “sharp”, not “fuzzy” ideas
fuzzy idea – improve communication among agencies
sharp idea – convene quarterly interagency meetings to review issues and progress
- D. If you volunteer to serve as a scribe for your group, capture everyone's ideas as presented without editing – please print
- E. Please turn all cell phones, pagers and electronic devices to inaudible

DVS staff members are available to answer questions about state government services.

If you have further comments at the end of this session, please send them to:

OPPT@vcu.edu or VCU, Office of Public Policy Training, PO Box 843024, Richmond, VA 23284-3024.

About the Virginia Department of Veterans Services

The Virginia Department of Veterans Services operates 20 benefit services offices where representatives assist veterans and their family members in filing claims for VA benefits. The agency operates two cemeteries for veterans: the Virginia Veterans Cemetery in Amelia and the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery in Suffolk. A third cemetery in Dublin, Virginia is in the initial stages of development. The agency operates the Virginia Veterans Care Center (VVCC) in Roanoke. The VVCC is a long-term care facility offering nursing and domiciliary care for veterans. The Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center is under construction in Richmond and is slated to open in 2007. The agency also certifies

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that post-secondary educational institutions meet G.I. Bill funding and eligibility requirements, enabling veterans and family members to pursue educational opportunities.