



**JOINT LEADERSHIP COUNCIL OF
VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS**

CHAIRMAN'S 2013 ANNUAL REPORT

TO

COMMISSIONER PAUL E. GALANTI

AND

THE BOARD OF VETERANS SERVICES

November 22, 2013

Table of Contents

Chairman’s Message.....	3
The Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations.....	4
2014 Initiatives.....	7
Position Paper 2014-01: Hiring and Retention of DVS Claims Agents	8
Position Paper 2014-02: Educating Employers on the Value of Hiring Veterans	9
Position Paper 2014-03: Funding for the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program	10
Position Paper 2014-04: Electronic Return of Absentee Ballots by Overseas Uniformed Military Voters	11
Position Paper 2014-05: Implementing the Virginia Homeless Veterans Program	13
Position Paper 2014-06: Measure if Virginia Veterans are being properly served	15
Position Paper 2014-07: Real Property Tax Exemption for Spouses of Military Killed in Action	16

Chairman's Message

The Joint Leadership Council (JLC) of Veterans Service Organizations is comprised of 24 veterans service organizations (VSOs) and represents over 250,000 VSO members who volunteer to improve the lives of Virginia's 840,000 veterans. Veterans comprise over 10% of the Commonwealth's citizenry, giving Virginia one of the highest per capita populations of veterans in the country. The JLC is proud to represent not only our members, but to serve as the voice of all of Virginia's veterans. While the JLC places major focus on veteran-related issues, we do, when deemed vital, extend our advocacy programs those issues assisting the other elements of the military community in the Commonwealth.

The JLC has developed, unanimously approved, and submitted seven initiatives to the Governor and General Assembly for consideration during the 2014 session. A summary of those initiatives and supporting positions papers are included below.

We deeply respect the work that faces the Department of Veterans Services, the Governor, and the General Assembly as they work to meet the needs of all Virginians. The JLC recognizes that resources are finite, and we are dedicated to finding innovative, creative ways to help create efficiencies and increase revenue for the Commonwealth while supporting our veterans. Our 2014 initiatives address the needs of Virginia's veterans, while being mindful of the fiscal status of our Commonwealth. The JLC looks forward to our continued involvement and partnership with the Department of Veterans Services, the Board of Veterans Services, and all of the veterans service organizations represented on the JLC.

Respectfully,

Donald B. Kaiserman, Colonel, USA (Retired)
Chairman

The Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations

The members of the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (the JLC) represent 24 veterans service organizations (VSOs) in Virginia, that, combined, have more than 250,000 members. The JLC was created by Virginia statute in 2003 to be the voice for Virginia's veterans service organizations, and, by extension, for Virginia's veterans. JLC members are appointed by the Governor for three-year terms. The JLC typically meets five times a year and meetings are open to the public.

Member Organizations

As of November 22, 2013, twenty-four VSOs were represented on the JLC:

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

Mission Statement

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

Vision

The Council will:

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

Issue Identification, Development, and Advocacy

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

Communication

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

2013 Meetings

The JLC typically holds five business meetings and one conference each year. In 2013 a Veterans Roundtable meeting was also held. The 2013 meeting schedule is as follows:

- January 10: JLC Conference at the General Assembly
- March 20: business meeting
- May 22: business meeting
- July 17: business meeting
- August 14: Veterans Roundtable meeting with Governor McDonnell (co-hosted with the Board of Veterans Services)
- October 16: business meeting
- December 18: business meeting (scheduled)

Minutes of JLC meetings are provided to the Board of Veterans Services (BVS) Chairman and Vice Chairman, and are posted on the Commonwealth Calendar and on the JLC page on the DVS website. The JLC also submits a report at each BVS meeting.

JLC Representation on other boards

- Board of Veterans Services: JLC Vice Chairman Thomas Moran serves as an *ex officio* member;
- Veterans Services Foundation: JLC Chairman Donald Kaiserman serves as an *ex officio* member;
- Virginia Military Advisory Council: JLC Vice Chairman Thomas Moran serves as the JLC Representative;
- Virginia War Memorial Board: JLC Chairman Donald Kaiserman serves as an *ex officio* member.

For More Information

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

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2014 Initiatives

The following initiatives were adopted by the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (the JLC) on July 17, 2013. These issues have the unanimous support of the 24 Veterans Service Organizations represented on the JLC.

<i>Initiative</i>	<i>Recommendation</i>
JLC 2014-01	That the Governor and General Assembly support competitive compensation authority and funding for DVS claims agents.
JLC 2014-02	That the Governor and General Assembly adopt budgeting/legislation that will allow the continuance of base funding for the Virginia Values Veterans (V3) Program to support hiring and retention of veterans, particularly those who have served during the past decade, and those returning from deployment.
JLC 2014-03	That the Governor and General Assembly continue and increase funding for the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program as a priority in the development and approval of the 2014-2016 biennial budget.
JLC 2014-04	That the Governor and General Assembly enact legislation to permit the electronic return of absentee ballot by overseas uniformed military voters.
JLC 2014-05	That the Governor and the General Assembly approve funding in the 2014-2016 biennial budget to move the Homeless Veterans Program forward. Up to \$450,000 in FY2015 and \$970,000 in FY2016.
JLC 2014-06	That the Governor and General Assembly provide one-time funding in the FY2015 budget to commission an update to the 2010 Virginia Tech report “ <i>Assessing the Experiences, Supportive Service Needs and Service Gaps of Veterans in the Commonwealth of Virginia</i> ” to measure progress in access to health care, behavioral healthcare and supportive community services, including employment, housing and financial assistance, for veterans, members of the National Guard and Reserves not in active federal service and their families in the Commonwealth.
JLC 2014-07	That the General Assembly pass a resolution to provide a Real Property Tax Exemption for Spouses of Military Killed in Action, identical to the resolution (HJ551) passed by the 2013 General Assembly, and that the Governor and General Assembly enact legislation to place a referendum on the ballot for the November 4, 2014 general election.

Position Paper 2014-01: Hiring and Retention of DVS Claims Agents

1. **OBJECTIVE:** Provide funds to fully staff, train, and retain Department of Veterans Services (DVS) claims agents along with full utilization of the automatic claims processing system to assure the timely development and submission of accurate veterans claims to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

2. **BACKGROUND:**
 - a. Veterans are entitled to disability compensation from the federal government for injuries or illnesses resulting from military service. To obtain this compensation, veterans must file claims with the VA.
 - b. Filing a claim is a long, complex process – most veterans seek assistance to file a claim.
 - c. To assist Virginia veterans, DVS operates 22 Benefits Field Offices that provide free assistance to Virginia veterans in developing and filing claims for compensation and pension benefits with the VA.
 - d. Virginia receives a considerable return on investment for helping Virginia veterans.
 - In FY2010, DVS filed 26,431 claims on behalf of Virginia veterans, resulting in an estimated \$122 million in new disability compensation payments.
 - In FY2011 the number of claims increased to 28,541 with an estimated in new payments impact of \$154 million.
 - e. DVS Benefit Field Offices are staffed by trained claims agents, particularly in using the automatic claims processing system, who provide direct, one-on-one assistance to veterans in developing and filing claims with the VA.
 - f. Knowledgeable, trained, and experienced claims agents are in high demand and many DVS agents leave for higher paying jobs that DVS cannot match.
 - g. DVS has had a 70 percent claims agent turnover during the past five years.
 - h. DVS does not have the financial resources to recruit and retain trained and experienced claims agents by being able to offer them competitive salaries based on their operational base.

3. **DISCUSSION:** The solution is to provide sufficient authorization and appropriation of funding so that DVS can offer competitive salaries based on each agent’s operational base and qualifications.

4. **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Governor and General Assembly support competitive compensation authority and funding for DVS claims agents.

Position Paper 2014-02: Educating Employers on the Value of Hiring Veterans

1. **Objective:** To encourage businesses to hire and retain veterans to both take them off of unemployment and have jobs ready for veterans when they leave the military or return from deployment.

2. **Background:**
 - The jobless rate for veterans who were in the service following September 11, 2001 was 7.2 percent as of June 2013, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. For all veterans, the unemployment rate was 6.3 percent.
 - The very successful Virginia Values Veterans (V3) Program, under the Department of Veterans Services (DVS), educates employers regarding the advantages of hiring veterans.
 - Base funding will continue to be required for the V3 Program; however, the success of any program of this nature is retention of hired veteran employees.
 - One new approach offered in the 2013 General Assembly Session under SB831 was to offer a Gold-Certified Veterans Employment status which focused on employee hiring and retention. It passed the Senate unanimously. Concern in the House focused around the perpetual nature of the grants rather than a one-time payment and the high annual salary (\$50,000) required to qualify. This indicates the need to further develop the program before suggesting that incentives be established.

3. **Discussion:**
 - a. The V3 Program has proven to be successful and base funding in the 2014-2016 biennial budget should continue at levels to permit its success to grow.
 - b. The Gold-Certified Veterans Employment Grant Fund program should be further investigated by DVS and revisited in advance of the 2015 General Assembly Session to ensure that:
 - A clear advantage is achieved through an incentive award program; and
 - The minimum annual salary level of the employee is realistic (e.g., at least \$30,000).

4. **Recommendation:** That the Governor and General Assembly adopt budgeting/legislation that will allow the continuance of base funding for the Virginia Values Veterans (V3) Program to support hiring and retention of veterans, particularly those who have served during the past decade, and those returning from deployment.

Position Paper 2014-03: Funding for the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program

1. **Objective:** Provide funding to ensure that veterans and their families, especially those affected by stress related conditions and traumatic brain injuries, have access to a network of community-based services for healthcare, behavioral healthcare, rehabilitative services and other critical support.

2. **Background:**
 - a. The Virginia Wounded Warrior Program (VWWP) was established in law by the 2008 Virginia General Assembly to ensure that services to veterans and their families are readily available in all areas of the Commonwealth.
 - b. The program monitors and coordinates behavioral health, rehabilitative, and support services for veterans and their families and addresses a myriad of health and wellness issues such as housing, financial assistance, employment, primary healthcare and other community services.
 - c. Virginia is home to approximately 837,000 veterans and is expected to grow to 850,000 in 2017. Included in this population are over 300,000 who served since September 11, 2001. The Virginia National Guard and Reserve components have been called upon as never before to deploy to combat zones.
 - d. The challenges of the current conflicts are enormous. Data indicate that 38% of Soldiers and 31% of Marines report psychological symptoms. Among members of the National Guard, the figure rises to 49%. Psychological symptoms are significantly higher among those with repeated deployments.

3. **Discussion:**
 - a. Virginia should do everything in its power to serve those who have defended our liberties and who may need services and community support because of stress related injuries and/or traumatic brain injuries resulting from military service.
 - b. The VWWP's vision for the future is "*Enhancing the quality of life for Virginia's veterans, service members and their families.*" This simple yet powerful statement is intended to provide guidance for the continued success and expansion of the VWWP, ensuring that the on-going focus is always Virginia's service members, veterans and families who have sacrificed their personal safety and needs to ensure freedom and liberty for all.
 - c. The number of veterans and family members served by VWWP increased by 220% from FY2010 to FY2012 (from 1,650 to 5,283). The success of the program ensures that demand for services will continue to rise, especially as the population of service members from Iraq and Afghanistan and their families return from deployment and renew their daily lives, employment, activities and community participation.
 - d. It is expected that the impact of the wars will continue to be felt for decades, just as previous wars have affected the health and well-being of service members and their families. It is critical that Virginia continue to recognize and address these concerns.

4. **Recommendation:** That the Governor and General Assembly continue and increase funding for the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program as a priority in the development and approval of the 2014-2016 biennial budget.

Position Paper 2014-04: Electronic Return of Absentee Ballots by Overseas Uniformed Military Voters

1. **Objective:** To allow for electronic return of absentee ballots by Overseas Uniformed Military voters.

2. **Background:**
 - a. Overseas uniformed service personnel and their dependents often experience difficulties in casting absentee ballots due to a number of factors, including the timely return of a voted ballot.
 - b. Currently an overseas voter can electronically register and receive an absentee ballot per the Uniformed & Overseas Absentee Voter Act (UOCAVA). By Virginia Code the ballot must be returned via “snail” mail.

Election	Total Votes*	Total Absentee*	UOCAVA**
2008 – Nov. Gen.	3,752,858	506,672	14,107 (0.4% of Total Vote)
2010 – Nov. Gen	2,214,503	106,888	1,785 (0.08% of Total Vote)
2012 – Nov. Gen.	3,896,846	447,907	Not yet available

* Per Virginia State Board of Elections – Election Results

** Ballots Submitted by Domestic & Overseas Uniformed Military (Election Assistance Commission report)

- c. SB830 as passed by the Senate in the 2013 General Assembly would allow the State Board of Elections (SBE) to provide instructions and procedures to enable uniformed-service voters outside the United States to return voted military overseas ballots securely by electronic format. As defined in subsections 9 and 10 of §24.2-452a “Uniformed-service voter” means an individual who is qualified to vote and is:
 - i. A member of the active or reserve components of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard of the United States who is on active duty;
 - ii. A member of the Merchant Marine, the commissioned corps of the Public Health Service, or the commissioned corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration of the United States;
 - iii. A member on activated status of the National Guard; or
 - iv. A spouse or dependent of a member referred to in this definition.
- d. "United States," used in the territorial sense, means the several states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the United States Virgin Islands, and any territory or insular possession subject to the jurisdiction of the United States.
- e. The Impact Statement for SB830 states that there is no material fiscal impact on SBE. However, localities may experience increased costs

3. **Discussion:**
 - a. SBE has expressed confidence in developing procedures that address privacy and security concerns related to the electronic transmission, management, and counting absentee ballots from uniformed military personnel serving overseas.
 - b. Legislation is required to permit electronic return of the voted ballot from uniformed military personnel serving overseas.
4. **Recommendation:** That the Governor and General Assembly enact legislation to permit the electronic return of absentee ballot by overseas uniformed military voters.

Position Paper 2014-05: Implementing the Virginia Homeless Veterans Program

1. **OBJECTIVE:** To plan, implement, and sustain an effective program to eliminate homelessness within our Virginia veterans population.

2. **BACKGROUND:**
 - a. Homelessness within the Virginia veterans population has been a long-term issue predating the Vietnam War.
 - b. The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) completed a significant study¹ in 2010 documenting a baseline size and nature of issue. The study found that significant long-term funding and a dedicated program would be required to solve the problem. Studies by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), veterans groups, and localities support the urgent need to implement the JLARC recommendations.
 - c. Those studies also establish that there have been significant increases in the number and percentage of women veterans and the children of veterans among the homeless.
 - d. Governor McDonnell specifically addressed homeless veterans in two major policy statements: Executive Order 29 and the establishment of a Homeless Working Group.
 - e. The General Assembly approved two positions in the Department of Veterans Services (DVS) to plan and coordinate an intensive program to dramatically reduce homelessness among veterans and their families. A Homeless Veterans Program (HVP) Director has been hired and the development of policies and procedures begun.

3. **DISCUSSION:**
 - a. Elimination of homelessness among Virginia's veterans requires a long-term effort.
 - b. During the first year (FY2015) an effective HVP will require an operating budget of about \$450,000². The HVP should continue development of a targeted program incorporating the resources of the VA and the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program (VWWP), which have established unique resources for assisting veterans.
 - c. The HVP should coordinate with community resources, identify grants which are available to reduce homelessness, identify locales to establish pilot programs, and field test pilot outreach efforts (one- and multi-day stand-downs) in at least two urban areas and four multi-county rural areas. Also, the HVP should form partnerships with emergency shelters and transitional housing in proximity to VA Medical Centers.
 - d. The second year of the HVP (FY2016) should be based upon lessons learned with a goal to implement specific programs that effectively serve urban, suburban, and rural areas. These programs, in addition to immediately reducing veteran homelessness, should continue to explore, test, and refine methods to enhance services throughout the Commonwealth. A budget of about \$970,000² may be required.
 - e. The goal for the out-years should be to provide an intensive and extensive delivery of services to eliminate homelessness among Virginia's veteran population. Future budget requests should be based upon the refined procedures developed to increase private/local government partnerships, to provide all levels of housing through grants and local organizations, work with Virginia's Community Colleges to provide skilled job training,

and providing counseling and health care using the VA, Virginia's Community Service Boards, and local Free Health Clinics.

4. **RECOMMENDATION**: That the Governor and the General Assembly approve funding in the 2014-2016 budget to move the Homeless Veterans Program forward. Up to \$450,000 in FY2015 and \$970,000 in FY2016².

Notes:

1. JLARC Study #402 *Reducing Veteran Homelessness in Virginia* issued in September 2010
2. JLARC cost estimates are found in Table 16 (page 93) in items 3), 4), and 12).

Position Paper 2014-06: Measure if Virginia Veterans are being properly served

1. **Objective:** Provide funding in the 2014-2016 biennial budget to commission an update to the 2010 Virginia Tech report “*Assessing the Experiences, Supportive Service Needs and Service Gaps of Veterans in the Commonwealth of Virginia*” to measure progress in access to health care, behavioral healthcare and supportive community services, including employment, housing and financial assistance, for veterans, members of the National Guard and Reserves not in active federal service and their families in the Commonwealth.
2. **Background:**
 - a. The Virginia Wounded Warrior Program (VWWP) was established in law by the 2008 Virginia General Assembly to ensure that services to veterans and their families are readily available in all areas of the Commonwealth.
 - b. The program monitors and coordinates behavioral health, rehabilitative, and support services for veterans and their families and addresses health and wellness issues such as housing, financial assistance, employment, healthcare and community services.
 - c. Virginia is home to approximately 837,000 veterans and is expected to grow to 850,000 in 2017. Included in this population are over 300,000 who served since September 11, 2001. The Virginia National Guard and Reserve components have been called upon as never before to deploy to combat zones.
 - d. The challenges of the current conflicts are enormous. Data indicate that 38% of Soldiers and 31% of Marines report psychological symptoms. Among members of the National Guard, the figure rises to 49%. Psychological symptoms are significantly higher among those with repeated deployments.
 - e. To determine the target populations and its needs VWWP contracted for a study with the Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance (VTIPG) in 2009. The VTIPG study assessed the current service experiences (consumer satisfaction), emerging and unserved needs and service gaps within the range of veteran’s services available in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Particular consideration was given to the behavioral health and traumatic brain injury service needs of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. This study served as the foundation for confirming the infrastructure of the VWWP, and has been instrumental in accessing funds through grant approval.
3. **Discussion:** Continued evolution and support of the VWWP would be enhanced by measuring the needs of the current veterans population and those of their families and the measurement of progress achieved in addressing those needs. The updated Needs Assessment will provide critical demographic data for continual quality and process improvement of the VWWP and its partner agencies and organizations.
4. **Recommendation:** That the Governor and General Assembly provide one-time funding in the FY2015 budget to commission an update to the 2010 Virginia Tech report “*Assessing the Experiences, Supportive Service Needs and Service Gaps of Veterans in the Commonwealth of Virginia*” to measure progress in access to health care, behavioral healthcare and supportive community services, including employment, housing and financial assistance, for veterans, members of the National Guard and Reserves not in active federal service and their families in the Commonwealth.

Position Paper 2014-07: Real Property Tax Exemption for Spouses of Military Killed in Action

1. **Objective:** To provide a real property tax exemption for the primary residence of surviving spouses of members of the military who are killed in action. Such tax exemption may not be claimed by a surviving spouse who has remarried.

2. **Background:**

- a. Current law only covers disabled veterans and their surviving spouses.
- b. House Joint Resolution (HJ) 551 (Ramadan) passed the 2013 General Assembly unanimously.
- c. This was the first step to amend the Virginia Constitution to allow an exemption of real property of spouses of service members killed in action.
- d. An identical resolution must pass the 2014 General Assembly.
- e. Legislation must also be passed by the 2014 General Assembly to place a referendum on the ballot for the November 2014 general election.

3. **Discussion:**

Language as passed in 2013:

Amend Section 6-A of Article X of the Constitution of Virginia as follows:

(b) Notwithstanding the provisions of Section 6, the General Assembly by general law, and within the restrictions and conditions prescribed therein, may exempt from taxation the real property of the surviving spouse of any member of the armed forces of the United States who was killed in action as determined by the United States Department of Defense, who occupies the real property as his or her principal place of residence. The exemption under this subdivision shall cease if the surviving spouse remarries and shall not be claimed thereafter. This exemption applies regardless of whether the spouse was killed in action prior to the effective date of this subdivision, but the exemption shall not be applicable for any period of time prior to the effective date. This exemption applies to the surviving spouse's principal place of residence without any restriction on the spouse's moving to a different principal place of residence and without any requirement that the spouse reside in the Commonwealth at the time of death of the member of the armed forces.

4. **Recommendations:**

- a. That the General Assembly pass a resolution identical to HJ551 passed by the 2013 General Assembly.
- b. That the Governor and General Assembly enact legislation to place a referendum on the ballot for the November 4, 2014 general election.