



**JOINT LEADERSHIP COUNCIL OF
VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS**

CHAIRMAN'S 2015 ANNUAL REPORT

TO

COMMISSIONER JOHN L. NEWBY II

AND

THE BOARD OF VETERANS SERVICES

November 30, 2015

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Chairman's Message

The Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (JLC) is comprised of 23 veterans service organizations (VSOs) representing over 250,000 members. JLC members are committed to serving Virginia's over 781,000 veterans in numerous ways, and also advocating for the entire military community, including the National Guard and the Armed Forces Reserves, and their families. Veterans comprise almost 10% of the Commonwealth's population, giving Virginia one of the highest per capita populations of veterans, and veterans still in the workforce, in the country.

We deeply value our partnership with the Department of Veterans Services, Board of Veterans Services, Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs, Governor, and General Assembly as we work together to serve Virginia's veterans and their families. The Governor and General Assembly has passed much of the budget and legislation we supported regarding veterans in the past few years and our members enjoy walking the halls of the General Assembly Building and talking to the Senators and Delegates about the bills, and why they merit a yes vote. It is important work and our members, all veterans, have the ability to convey to legislators this importance in a way few others could.

JLC has developed, approved, and submitted twelve initiatives to the Governor and General Assembly for consideration during the 2016 session.

The JLC is proud to represent not only our member VSOs, but to serve as a voice of all of Virginia's veterans. The JLC looks forward to our continued involvement in the legislative process and promoting Virginia as the most veteran friendly state on behalf of all of the VSOs represented on the JLC.

Respectfully,

Harold H. (Bart) Barton, Jr.
Chairman

The Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations

The members of the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (the JLC) represent 23 veterans service organizations (VSOs) in Virginia, that, combined, have more than 250,000 members. The JLC was created by Virginia statute in 2003 to be 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 30, 2015, twenty-three VSOs are represented on the JLC:

- Air Force Association
- 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.

2015 Meetings

The JLC typically holds five business meetings and one conference each year. The 2015 meeting schedule is as follows:

- January 15: JLC Conference at the General Assembly
- March 18: Business Meeting
- May 20: Business Meeting
- July 15: Business Meeting
- October 21: 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: <http://www.dvs.virginia.gov/dvs/joint-leadership-council-veterans-service-organizations>. The JLC also submits a report at each BVS meeting.

2015-2016 Officers

- Chairman: Harold H. “Bart” Barton
- Vice Chairman: Marie G. Juliano
- Legislative Officer: Richard Oertel
- Assistant Legislative Officer: David Sitler
- Chaplain: L. T. “Tim” Whitmore
- Constitution & ByLaws Committee:
 - Chairman: Daniel Boyer
 - Members: Perry Taylor and Adam Provost
- Nominating Committee:
 - Chairman: Open
 - Members: Open

JLC Representation on Other Boards, Councils, etc.

- **Board of Veterans Services:** JLC Chairman Bart Barton serves as an *ex officio* member;
- **Veterans Services Foundation:** Jim Cuthbertson serves as an *ex officio* member;
- **Virginia Military Advisory Council:** William Barrett serves as primary JLC Representative, Robert Sempek serves as the alternate;
- **Virginia War Memorial Board:** Marie Juliano serves as an *ex officio* member;
- **Virginia Department of Elections Electronic Ballot Return Working Group:** Stu Williams represents the JLC

For More Information

Please visit the JLC page on the DVS website at <http://www.dvs.virginia.gov/dvs/joint-leadership-council-veterans-service-organizations/>

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2015 Initiatives - Status

The following initiatives were adopted by the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (the JLC) on July 16, 2014 and presented to the Governor and General Assembly for consideration in the 2015 Session. Listed below is a summary of those recommendations and the actions taken.

<i>Initiative</i>	<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Status</i>
JLC 2015-01	That the Governor and General Assembly support the hiring, training, and retention of Department of Veterans Services (DVS) Veterans Service Representatives, the addition of representatives in understaffed locations, and the building of needed service capacity at Benefits Offices, by approving an additional \$1,750,000 (GF) in FY2016.	\$1,750,000 (GF) approved for FY2016.
JLC 2015-02	That the Governor and General Assembly support the continued delivery of critical core behavioral health, rehabilitative, and supportive services for Virginia veterans, Guardsmen, Reservists, and family members by appropriating an additional \$281,000 (GF) for the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program (VWWP) in FY2016.	No additional funding approved for FY2016.
JLC 2015-03	That the Governor and General Assembly authorize \$161,000 (GF) (partial-year funding) and three new positions for the Virginia War Memorial in FY2016; two additional new positions in FY2017 (for a total of five); and full funding of \$404,000 (GF) for all positions in FY2017.	Partial funding – \$107,000 (GF) – and two positions were approved for FY2016.
JLC 2015-04	That the Governor and the General Assembly support the further reduction of veteran homelessness by approving additional funding in FY2016 for: a. \$180,000 (GF) for DVS/VWWP to add three new Housing Resource Specialists in Hampton Roads, Northern Virginia, and Roanoke. b. \$1 million (GF) for the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to support increases in general statewide homeless prevention, rapid re-housing, and permanent supportive housing funding.	\$180,000 (GF) approved for DVS in FY 2016. \$1 million (GF) approved for DHCD in FY2016, with \$500,000 earmarked for homeless veterans.

JLC 2015-05	That the General Assembly and the Governor approve the establishment of a veterans' lottery as part of the Compact with Virginia's Veterans to supplement the General Fund's support of approved veteran's requirements, with any residual lottery funding reverting back to Education.	No action taken.
JLC 2015-06	That the Governor and General Assembly increase the state funding commitment for the Hampton Roads and Northern Virginia veterans care center construction projects, and, once the higher state commitment is approved, that DVS request increased federal grant funding for the two projects.	The General Assembly approved the funding commitment and as part of the reconvened session the legislation (HB 1275 & 1276 [Cox]; SB675 & SB 676 [Puller]) was amended to move forward with approval to build new veterans care centers using only state funds.

2016 Initiatives

JLC Initiatives 2016-01 through 2016-08 were adopted and prioritized by the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (the JLC) on July 15, 2015.

JLC Initiatives 2016-09 through 2016-12 were adopted by the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (the JLC) on October 21, 2015.

These issues have the unanimous support of the 23 Veterans Service Organizations represented on the JLC.

Summary

<i>Initiative</i>	<i>Recommendation</i>
JLC 2016-01 <i>Veterans Care Centers</i>	That the Governor and General Assembly continue state support for the Hampton Roads and Northern Virginia veterans care center construction projects by appropriating additional state funding to complete the construction of both centers.
JLC 2016-02 <i>DVS Benefits Services</i>	That the Governor and General Assembly 1) increase the Benefits Services division's budget by \$783,000 (GF) in FY17 and \$1,474,000 (GF) in FY18, and 2) increase staffing levels by six positions in FY17 and nine positions in FY18, to complete the three-year plan to strengthen and expand the DVS Benefits Services division.
JLC 2016-03 <i>VA Veteran & Family Support Services</i>	That the Governor and General Assembly appropriate an additional \$2,147,591 (GF) and authorize 39 new positions for VVFS in FY17 to convert VVFS to an all-state employee workforce. FY18 funding should be \$98,831 (GF) above FY17 levels.
JLC 2016-04 <i>Virginia War Memorial</i>	That the Governor and General Assembly appropriate an additional \$509,985 (GF) in FY17 and \$800,235 (GF) in FY18, and authorize three additional positions, to ensure that the Virginia War Memorial has the resources necessary to accomplish its dual mission of honor and education.
JLC 2016-05 <i>In-state tuition for all members of the Reserve Components</i>	That the Governor and the General Assembly change the eligibility for in-state tuition to include all members of the Virginia National Guard and the Reserve components, thus recognizing their service to the Commonwealth and treating them equally to the active components and veterans.
JLC 2016-06 <i>Guard Income Tax Subtraction</i>	That the Governor and General Assembly increase the state income tax subtraction level for members of the Virginia National Guard from \$3,000 to \$5,000 per year.
JLC 2016-07 <i>VMSDEP</i>	That the Governor and General Assembly a. When determining eligibility for higher education benefits under the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program (VMSDEP), remove the requirement that a veteran's disability rating be combat related. Instead, a permanent disability rating of at least

	<p>90%, plus satisfaction of the other requirements currently in the Code, would qualify a veteran's spouse or child for education benefits.</p> <p>Evaluate whether funding from other programs could potentially offset the increased cost to the VMSDEP.</p>
<p>JLC 2016-08 <i>Electronic Ballot Return</i></p>	<p>That the Governor and General Assembly promote the development, approval, and budgeting of secure procedures to permit the electronic return of absentee ballot by overseas uniformed military voters.</p>
<p>JLC 2016-09 <i>Veterans Dockets</i></p>	<p>That the Governor and General Assembly take the legislative and/or budget actions necessary to allow local courts to establish a Veterans Docket under the supervision of the Virginia Supreme Court.</p>
<p>JLC 2016-10 <i>Bridge to Health Care Careers for Former Military Medics and Corpsmen</i></p>	<p>That the Governor and General Assembly provide the budget support and pass the legislation necessary to assist former military medics and corpsmen in continuing to use their skills learned in the service and to place them on a path to careers in Virginia health care industry.</p>
<p>JLC 2016-11 <i>VCCS Veteran Advisors and Resource Centers</i></p>	<p>That the Governor and General Assembly appropriate the funding necessary to establish dedicated Veteran Advisors and Resource Centers on Virginia Community College System campuses to coordinate and centralize campus efforts to aid veterans in transitioning from military service and achieving success on campus.</p>
<p>JLC 2016-12 <i>Virginia Taxes and Veteran Service Organizations</i></p>	<p>That the Governor and General Assembly pass legislation to extend to 501(c)(19) Veterans Service Organizations the exemptions provided for 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) organizations.</p>

Position Paper 2016-01: Veteran Care Centers

- 1. OBJECTIVE:** to ensure the continued commitment of the Commonwealth of Virginia to the construction of veterans care centers in Hampton Roads and Northern Virginia.
- 2. BACKGROUND:**
 - a. Virginia's veterans care centers deliver skilled nursing, domiciliary, Alzheimer's/dementia care, and short-term rehabilitation to Virginia veterans. Virginia currently has 440 beds at veterans care centers in Richmond and Roanoke.
 - b. The U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) awards grants that fund up to 65% of project costs for state veterans care centers. States must fund at least 35%.
 - c. Grants are awarded in accordance with the grant priority system established by 38 C.F.R. §59.50. In many years, the amount of federal funds requested by the states exceeds the amount available to be awarded.
 - d. Based on the continued commitment of the Commonwealth to the construction of veterans care centers in Hampton Roads and Northern Virginia, the 2015 General Assembly unanimously approved Governor McAuliffe's amendments to four bills.
 - e. The bills authorize \$66.7M in state bond funds to be spent prior to the award of a federal grant. It is estimated that this amount will provide for the design of two 120-bed centers and the construction of one (estimated to begin in 2017).
 - f. Approval of additional state bond funding in 2016 will allow for the construction of both centers.
 - g. The net result will be to bring the two centers on line several years earlier, while Virginia waits for the federal share of project funding.
- 3. DISCUSSION:** Continued state commitment to build the centers reflects a positive commitment to Virginia's veterans and will hopefully result in reimbursement from VA grant funds in the future.
- 4. RECOMMENDATION:** That the Governor and General Assembly continue state support for the Hampton Roads and Northern Virginia veterans care center construction projects by appropriating additional state funding to complete the construction of both centers.

Position Paper 2016-02: DVS Benefits Services

1. **OBJECTIVE:** Create financial stability for Virginia veterans and increase access to U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care by completing the three-year plan to strengthen the Department of Veterans Services (DVS) Benefits Services division.
2. **BACKGROUND:**
 - a. Veterans who are wounded or injured while on active duty may file disability compensation claims with the VA; this is often a long, complicated process.
 - b. DVS operates 25 Benefits Services Offices (26 as of December 2015) that provide free assistance to Virginia veterans in developing and filing VA claims; these offices are staffed by trained and VA-accredited staff members who provide direct, one-on-one assistance.
 - c. Knowledgeable, trained, and experienced staff members are in high demand; DVS has implemented a career development plan to hire, train, and retain knowledgeable, skilled employees.
 - d. In order to improve access to services, DVS has opened two new offices in the past year – in Chesapeake and Petersburg; a new Fredericksburg office will open in December 2015. DVS has also relocated several offices to better locations and ordered new furniture and equipment in order to create a more professional and efficient work environment for DVS staff and their veteran-clients.
 - e. Virginia receives a considerable return on investment for helping Virginia veterans. In FFY13, the VA paid \$2.3B in disability compensation and pension benefits to Virginia veterans; this rose to over \$2.7B in FFY14.
3. **DISCUSSION:** The DVS Benefits Services creates financial stability for Virginia veterans and families and helps enable access to VA health care. In order for the division to continue its mission, additional resources are needed to:
 - a. Complete the implementation of career development plan to recruit, hire, train, and retain Benefit Services staff;
 - b. Open new Benefits Offices in Loudoun County, Prince William County, and the Pentagon in FY17, and in Williamsburg in FY18;
 - c. Hire a licensed attorney in FY18 to assist Virginia veterans through the appeals process, and
 - d. Cover increased office rent and other operating costs.
4. **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Governor and General Assembly 1) increase the Benefits Services division's budget by \$783,000 (GF) in FY17 and \$1,474,000 (GF) in FY18, and 2) increase staffing levels by six positions in FY17 and nine positions in FY18, to complete the three-year plan to strengthen and expand the DVS Benefits Services division.

Position Paper 2016-03: Virginia Veteran and Family Support Services

1. **OBJECTIVE:** Put in place the service-delivery structure necessary to meet the behavioral health, rehabilitative, and supportive services needs of Virginia's veterans, Guardsmen, Reservists, and their families into the next decade and beyond by hiring all Virginia Veteran and Family Support (VVFS) direct services staff as Department of Veterans Services (DVS) full-time employees.
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. Now known as VVFS, the program provides a statewide delivery and response system for behavioral health, rehabilitative, and supportive services needs.
 - c. VVFS provided 5,465 services in Fiscal Year (FY) 2013, rising to 7,755 in FY2015. Service numbers are expected to top 8,000 in FY2016 and continue to rise.
 - d. Virginia is home to approximately 781,000 veterans and is forecast to rise to 790,000 veterans in 2020. 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.
 - e. 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 markedly higher among those with repeated deployments. Families are also significantly affected.
3. **DISCUSSION:**
 - a. VVFS is a model state program that addresses service gaps for veterans/families.
 - b. Over the last seven years, VVFS has evolved from a program for our war wounded only to a *No Wrong Door* program for all Virginia veterans, Guardsmen and Reservists not in federal service, and their families.
 - c. The existing VVFS service-delivery structure, which operates through regional consortia of Community Service Boards, worked well when the program was launched in 2008; however, it is no longer optimal to meet current demand for services, nor is it optimized to meet expected future growth.
 - d. Under the current model, VVFS has operational responsibility for VVFS direct services and outcomes, but not the operational authority or accountability. VVFS operates through contracts with five financial and 11 hiring authorities.
 - e. Converting VVFS to an all-state employee workforce will give DVS the responsibility, authority and accountability for program operations, and will enable true enterprise standardization for delivery of services.
 - f. As a result, outcomes will be improved for Virginia veterans, Guardsmen, Reservists, and their families, and VVFS will be properly resourced and structured to meet current and projected demand.
4. **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Governor and General Assembly appropriate an additional \$2,147,591 (GF) and authorize 39 new positions for VVFS in FY17 to convert VVFS to an all-state employee workforce. FY18 funding should be \$98,831 (GF) above FY17 levels.

Position Paper 2016-04: Virginia War Memorial

1. OBJECTIVE: To ensure that the Virginia War Memorial (the Memorial) has the personnel and financial resources necessary to operate the premier state-level memorial in the nation and accomplish its Code-mandated mission.

2. BACKGROUND:

- a. Per § 2.2-2001.3(B) of the Code of Virginia: *“The mission of the Virginia War Memorial shall be to honor patriotic Virginians who rendered faithful service and sacrifice in the cause of freedom and liberty for the Commonwealth and the nation in time of war, honor all of Virginia’s veterans, preserve their history, educate the public, and inspire patriotism in all Virginians.”*
- b. The Memorial has developed and implemented new and/or expanded programs and services to accomplish this mission.
- c. The number of visitors increased from 19,000 in 2010 to over 66,000 in 2014, is expected to top 70,000 in 2015, and could grow to over 100,000 per year.
- d. The Governor and General Assembly have approved the construction of a 19,500 square foot expansion of the Memorial, expected to be completed in late 2017, to house the expanded programs and services and to accommodate the increasing number of visitors.

3. DISCUSSION:

- a. The Virginia War Memorial is the premier state-level memorial in the nation.
- b. The Memorial has developed and implemented new and/or expanded programs and services to accomplish its Code-mandated mission. As a result, the numbers of visitors to the Memorial has grown and will continue to grow.
- c. A 19,500 square foot addition will come on line in late 2017.
- d. To continue to deliver effective programs and services, and to accommodate the growth in the number of visitors, additional resources are required for:
 - i. Full-year funding for the two new FTEs authorized for FY16;
 - ii. Funding and positions for three new FTEs and two wage positions necessary to maintain current service levels, prepare for the opening of the new addition, and operate the new addition;
 - iii. Increased operating and security costs; and
 - iv. Expanded programs and services.

4. RECOMMENDATION: That the Governor and General Assembly appropriate an additional \$509,985 (GF) in FY17 and \$800,235 (GF) in FY18, and authorize three additional positions, to ensure that the Virginia War Memorial has the resources necessary to accomplish its dual mission of honor and education.

Position Paper 2016-05: In-state Tuition Eligibility for members of the Reserve Components

1. **OBJECTIVE:** Provide in-state tuition eligibility at a public colleges and universities for all members of the reserve components of the Armed Forces.
2. **BACKGROUND:**
 - a. Members of the Virginia National Guard and Armed Forces Reserve stationed in the Commonwealth of Virginia, who domicile in another state but reside in Virginia, are not currently eligible for in-state tuition if they have not resided in Virginia for at least one-year.
 - b. Individuals enlisting in the Virginia National Guard or Reserves generally make a six-year commitment to train, drill, and have their duty location in Virginia.
3. **DISCUSSION:**
 - a. The six-year commitment to protect the Commonwealth, along with residence (physical presence) within the Commonwealth, justifies immediate eligibility for in-state tuition rates for the guardsman or reservist.
 - b. The Commonwealth provides in-state tuition to active duty soldiers, and activated (full-time) reservists and guardsmen who are on long term orders, who reside in Virginia. In addition, veterans and dependents of active duty soldiers on orders are granted in-state tuition rates.
 - c. The requested legislation expands this benefit to all members of the Virginia National Guard and Reserve components who reside in Virginia.
 - d. It is only equitable that the Commonwealth supports its Guard and Reserve members to at least the same degree as it supports active duty service members and families stationed in the Commonwealth.
 - e. Virginia National Guardsmen directly support the Commonwealth through state missions. They respond to the call of the Governor unless deployed in support of a federal mission.
 - f. Drill weekends and annual training periods often focus on preparing for threats and needs of the Commonwealth. The proposed legislatives initiative is the proper thing to do for the Commonwealth's citizen-soldiers.
 - g. The Virginia National Guard is "the Guardian of the Commonwealth" and the military force of the Governor of Virginia. It is reasonable that in-state tuition rates be provided to these soldiers and airmen who support missions in the Commonwealth.
4. **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Governor and the General Assembly change the eligibility for in-state tuition to include all members of the Virginia National Guard and the Reserve components, thus recognizing their service to the Commonwealth and treating them equality to the active components and veterans.

Position Paper 2016-06: Increase State Tax Subtraction for National Guard

1. OBJECTIVE: Increase the state tax subtraction for members of the Virginia National Guard from \$3,000 to \$5,000 per year.

2. BACKGROUND:

- a. The Code of Virginia, §58.1-322(C)(11) provides for a subtraction of “*The wages or salaries received by any person for active and inactive service in the National Guard of the Commonwealth of Virginia, not to exceed the amount of income derived from 39 calendar days of such service or \$3,000, whichever amount is less; however, only those persons in the ranks of O3 and below shall be entitled to the deductions specified herein.*”
- b. The subtraction level has remained at \$3,000 since at least 1994.

3. DISCUSSION:

- a. Soldiers and Airmen of the Virginia National Guard endure higher level of stressors in their service to the Commonwealth than do many citizens.
- b. Economic factors place additional stressors on Guardsmen and their families.
- c. Virginia Guardsmen work many hours in the performance of their Guard duties, making sacrifices of time, money, and family togetherness.
- d. To have the same buying power as \$3,000 did in 1994, the tax subtraction would have to be \$4,830.73 in 2015 (source: Bureau of Labor Statistics – http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm).
- e. Increasing the state income tax subtraction from \$3,000 to \$5,000 would help balance and compensate for financial shortfalls incurred through Guard service and the necessity to balance their civilian jobs, family life, and service as a citizen-soldier.

4. RECOMMENDATION: That the Governor and General Assembly increase the state income tax subtraction level for members of the Virginia National Guard from \$3,000 to \$5,000 per year.

Position Paper 2016-07: Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program

1. **OBJECTIVE:** to change eligibility for higher education benefits under the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program (VMSDEP).
2. **BACKGROUND:**
 - a. The VMSDEP, formally known as the War Orphans Education Program, provides education benefits to spouses and children of military service members killed, missing in action, taken prisoner, or who became at least 90 percent disabled as a result of military service in an armed conflict.
 - b. Military service includes service in the United States Armed Forces, United States Armed Forces Reserves, and the Virginia National Guard.
 - c. Armed conflict includes military operations against terrorism or as the result of a terrorist act, a peace-keeping mission, or any armed conflict after Dec. 6, 1941.
 - d. Under VMSDEP, tuition and required fees are waived at Virginia public colleges and universities.
 - e. Students may also receive a stipend of up to \$1,800 per year toward the cost of room, board, books, and supplies. The amount of the stipend is dependent on the amount of funding appropriated (\$1,930,000 in FY16), the number of enrolled students, and their enrollment status.
 - f. Benefits are available for up to four years or the equivalent.
3. **DISCUSSION:**
 - a. Under current law, the veteran's 90% disability rating must have incurred during military operations against terrorism, on a peacekeeping mission, as a result of a terrorist act, or in any armed conflict.
 - b. The fiscal impact statement (FIS) prepared for SB303 (2014 General Assembly) estimated that removing the link to service in an armed conflict would increase the number of annual VMSDEP beneficiaries by 415.
 - c. The FIS estimated that the proposed legislation would result in a system-wide loss of tuition revenue of \$2,182,454 in FY15 and \$2,520,734 in FY16. This is a potentially significant fiscal impact on higher education institutions, and additional general fund support may need to be appropriated to offset this loss of revenue.
 - d. Other state programs, including the Virginia Tuition Assistance Grant Program and the Virginia Community College Tuition Grant for Foster Care, provide state funding for college students.
4. **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Governor and General Assembly remove the requirement that a veteran's disability rating be combat related. Instead, a permanent disability rating of at least 90%, plus satisfaction of the other requirements currently in the Code, would qualify a veteran's spouse or child for VMSDEP benefits. Evaluate whether funding from other programs above could potentially offset the increased cost to the VMSDEP.

Position Paper 2016-08: Electronic Return of Voted Ballots by Overseas Military

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	12,036 (0.31% of Total Vote)
2014 – Nov. Gen.	2,194,346	123,221	Not yet available

* *Per Virginia State Board of Elections – Election Results*

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

- c. SB11 passed by the 2014 General Assembly allows the State Board of Elections to form a working group to develop procedures enabling uniformed-service voters outside the United States to return voted military overseas ballots securely by electronic format.
- d. Electronic return of the voted ballot per SB11 will not become effective unless reenacted by the 2016 Session of the General Assembly.
- e. The State Board of Elections (SBE) indicates that implementing a system to ensure secure return of voted military-overseas ballots would have a fiscal impact, particularly with the security requirements. Actual impact will not be known until procedures have been developed and approved.

3. DISCUSSION:

- a. The State Board of Elections 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. General Assembly approval in 2016 is required to permit electronic return of the voted ballot from uniformed military personnel serving overseas.

4. RECOMMENDATION: That the Governor and General Assembly promote development, approval, and budgeting of secure procedures to permit the electronic return of absentee ballot by overseas uniformed military voters.

Position Paper 2016-09: Veterans Dockets

1. **OBJECTIVE:** to allow local courts to establish a Veterans Docket under the supervision of the Virginia Supreme Court to adjudicate non-violent cases involving eligible veterans who meet specific criteria.
2. **BACKGROUND:**
 - a. Veterans Dockets are specialized court dockets, operating within the judicial system, that treat offending veterans who meet specific criteria. Judicial and medical monitoring is required for the health of the veteran and her/his safe return to society.
 - b. Veterans Dockets help eligible veterans with their otherwise non-treated problems, which could include: post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), combat or military-related trauma, or medically-diagnosed persistent traumas including mental health or substance abuse issues.
 - c. Veterans Dockets address and treat the underlying military service-connected factors that led to criminal behavior and reduce recidivism rates while enhancing public safety and promoting offender accountability.
 - d. Veterans Dockets do not grant veterans a different standard of justice; rather, Veterans Dockets focus on connecting veterans with available support and the assistance they need.
3. **DISCUSSION:**
 - a. Virginia veterans who carry the invisible wounds of military service, and who come in contact with the law, should be recognized as needing special assistance.
 - b. The goal of Veterans Dockets are to serve the community and increase public safety by integrating and incorporating a coordinated treatment response for justice-involved veterans with substance abuse and/or mental health issues with the goal of returning productive, law-abiding citizens to the community.
 - c. In other states with Veterans Dockets, incarceration costs are significantly reduced, as are recidivism rates.
 - d. Veterans Dockets allow judicial monitoring of corrective treatment and supervision for those veterans who have special conditions and needs based on military service, mental illness, substance addictions, or difficulty in societal re-entry.
 - e. Oversight of Veterans Dockets is the purview of the Virginia Supreme Court, which would be responsible for overseeing and approving: 1) training for judges who preside over Veterans Dockets; 2) judicial oversight and technical assistance; 3) distribution of funds to support administration of Veterans Dockets; 4) training for Veterans Docket administrators, case managers/mentors, and treatment services providers; and 5) evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of the dockets.
4. **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Governor and General Assembly take the legislative and/or budget actions necessary to allow local courts to establish a Veterans Docket under the supervision of the Virginia Supreme Court.

Position Paper 2016-10: Bridge to Health Care Careers for Former Military Medics and Corpsmen

1. **OBJECTIVE:** to provide former military medics and corpsmen with employment opportunities and help fill workforce gaps for employers in the Virginia healthcare sector.
2. **BACKGROUND:**
 - a. 11,000 medics and corpsmen transitioned out of the military in 2014.
 - b. Medics and corpsmen receive extensive and valuable health care training while on active duty.
 - c. This military health care experience may not easily translate into comparable certifications/licenses required for health care jobs, meaning that former medics and corpsmen may be required to spend two or more years in school before they can obtain the credentials necessary to work in Virginia's healthcare sector.
3. **DISCUSSION:**
 - a. Because former medics and corpsmen cannot move directly into the healthcare sector without further training and credentialing, they may be unemployed, or underutilized and underpaid. Their potential to make an immediate impact on Virginia's health is untapped.
 - b. Creation of a medic and corpsmen health career pilot program would allow Virginia health care employers to hire former medics and corpsmen immediately after their separation from the military, tapping into their skills and experience.
 - c. To create the pilot program:
 - i. Legislation is required to give licensed practitioners the authority to delegate certain tasks to these highly-skilled veterans, enabling them to utilize their medical training in the Virginia health care sector.
 - ii. Funding is needed in order to test clinical utility, build buy-in from and familiarize hospitals with the veterans' skills and abilities, and test whether medics/corpsmen would be interested in this role.
4. **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Governor and General Assembly provide the budget support and pass the legislation necessary to assist former military medics and corpsmen in continuing to use their skills learned in the service and to place them on a path to careers in Virginia health care industry.

Position Paper 2016-11: VCCS Veterans Advisors and Resource Centers

1. **OBJECTIVE:** To help veterans achieve success on Virginia Community College System campuses by establishing dedicated Veteran Advisors and Resource Centers to coordinate and centralize campus support.
2. **BACKGROUND:** Virginia has the fastest growing veteran population in the nation, the largest percentage of veterans under the age of twenty-five, and the highest percentage of veterans in the working-age population. One of the most valuable workforce development tools for these veterans is the Virginia Community College System (VCCS).
3. **DISCUSSION:**
 - a. In order to facilitate a smooth transition from military service to education and employment, dedicated veterans advisors and resource centers should be placed on VCCS campuses.
 - b. At present, veteran advisory services are neither consistently offered nor uniformly measured on VCCS campuses.
 - c. Dedicated veteran advisors would provide comprehensive and intensive enrollment and advising services to current and prospective students.
 - d. Veterans resource centers would:
 - i. Provide access to federal and state veterans resources;
 - ii. Serve as a quiet place for veterans to study;
 - iii. Enable veterans to connect to other veterans, helping them renew the bonds of military service; and
 - iv. Be the central hub for all veteran-related activities on campus.
4. **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Governor and General Assembly appropriate the funding necessary to establish dedicated Veteran Advisors and Resource Centers on Virginia Community College System campuses to coordinate and centralize campus efforts to aid veterans in transitioning from military service and achieving success on campus.

Position Paper 2016-12: Veterans Service Organizations and Virginia Tax Designation

1. **OBJECTIVE:** to classify 501(c)(19) Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) as charitable non-profit organizations under state law. Without this classification, VSOs are vulnerable to being considered as “for profit” entities and therefore subject to local taxes.
2. **BACKGROUND:** VSOs are not identified as charitable nonprofit organizations in the Virginia Tax Code as they are in the Federal Tax Code 501(c)(19). Therefore, VSOs are vulnerable to tax levies by local governments and municipalities. This threatens their financial ability to do charitable work to support Veterans and Virginia communities and in some instances the continued existence of VSO-owned facilities that have had a long-time presence in the community.
3. **DISCUSSION:**
 - a. Many VSOs are organized under 501(c)(19) of the Internal Revenue Code (IRC). This tax code was established by Congress in 1972 to provide special recognition to VSOs for their service to our nation.
 - b. Many states have already followed the example set in 1972 by Congress. This is not the case for the Commonwealth of Virginia.
 - c. By not recognizing VSOs as charitable non-profit organizations, the Code of Virginia permits counties, cities, and towns to tax VSOs organized under IRC 501(c)(19), treating VSOs like “for profit” businesses, when in fact VSOs are organized for fraternal and charitable purposes.
 - d. Local taxes include real estate taxes. One local post, in its current location for over 52 years, has recently been informed that it may owe such taxes.
 - e. Local VSOs often serve as centers of a local community. VSOs sponsor baseball teams, host community meetings at VSO-owned facilities, participate in fundraising drives and community events, and generally make a lasting and meaningful impact on the communities in which they are located.
 - f. Requiring VSOs to pay local taxes on VSO-owned facilities could mean the difference between these VSOs staying in operation, or having to close their doors and cease operations.
 - g. The exemptions provided for 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) organizations should be extended to 501(c)(19) Veterans Service Organizations because of their charitable and fraternal nature, and because of the vital role they serve in Virginia communities.
4. **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Governor and General Assembly pass legislation to extend to 501(c)(19) Veterans Service Organizations the exemptions provided for 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) organizations.