



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA JOINT LEADERSHIP COUNCIL OF VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

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RICHMOND, VA 23219

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Korean War Veterans
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Marine Corps League
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Military Officers Association
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Navy Seabee Veterans of
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Reserve Officers Association
Roanoke Valley Veterans
Council
Veterans of Foreign Wars
Vietnam Veterans of America
Virginia Army/Air National
Guard Enlisted
Association
Virginia National Guard
Association
Women Marines Association*

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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; and
 - c. 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 \$903,000 (GF) in FY17 and \$1,324,000 (GF) in FY18, and 2) increase staffing levels by seven positions in FY17 and nine positions in FY18, to complete the three-year plan to strengthen and expand the DVS Benefits Services division.