



**JOINT LEADERSHIP COUNCIL OF  
VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS**

**CHAIR'S 2010 ANNUAL REPORT**

**TO**

**COMMISSIONER PAUL E. GALANTI**

**AND**

**THE BOARD OF VETERANS SERVICES**

**November 30, 2010**

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## Chair's Message

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

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

In 2010, the JLC saw success during the legislative session with many of our objectives. Most notable was our advocacy of the real estate tax exemption for 100% disabled veterans. The General Assembly approved the Constitutional amendment and it was then approved by the voters on November 2, 2010, with an 82.4% favorable vote. We eagerly await the passage of enacting legislation by the 2011 General Assembly.

The General Assembly heard the requests of the JLC and continued the level funding of the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program; passed a bill so grants from the Military Family Relief Fund are not treated as taxable income; and appropriated funds so burial vaults can be sold at cost at our veterans cemeteries. The Department of Veterans Services (DVS) began selling vaults in August, providing our veterans a significant cost savings.

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

This past summer, we chose six legislative objectives to help our veterans and their families that are described in the following pages. As 2010 draws to a close, we will work diligently with the Governor and members of the General Assembly to prepare for their legislative session in 2011, to improve the lives of our greatest citizens, our veterans and their families, to whom we owe so much.

Respectfully,

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

## **The Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations**

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

### **Member Organizations**

As of November 30, 2010, twenty-three VSOs were represented on the JLC:

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

### **Mission Statement**

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

## **Vision**

*The Council will:*

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

## **Issue Identification, Development, and Advocacy**

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

In 2010, the Governor and General Assembly acted on five of the JLC's six legislative objectives.

## **Communication**

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

## **For More Information**

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

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## 2011 Legislative Objectives

The following legislative objectives were adopted by the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (the JLC) on July 21, 2010. These are the prioritized objectives of the 23 Veterans Service Organizations represented on the JLC.

1. **Alternate Dedicated Revenue Sources for Veterans Programs.** The JLC requests that the Governor and General Assembly provide some of the resources required to implement the Compact with Virginia's Veterans by creating alternate dedicated revenue sources for veterans programs.
2. **DVS Benefit Services Program.** The JLC requests that the Governor and General Assembly improve services to Virginia veterans by restoring staffing for the DVS Benefits Services Program. An additional \$402,400 (GF) per fiscal year is needed.
3. **State Veterans Cemeteries.** The JLC requests that the Governor and General Assembly ensure that state veterans cemeteries operate in a safe, efficient manner and meet national shrine standards by filling vacant positions, replacing worn out equipment, and purchasing necessary supplies. An additional \$387,100 (GF) per fiscal year is needed.
4. **Special Judicial Procedures for Veterans and Military Service Members.** The JLC requests that the Governor and General Assembly help veterans and military service members who have been charged with a crime by allowing localities to establish special judicial procedures. These procedures would emphasize use of available treatment options as an alternative to incarceration and would benefit veterans, military service members, and the community.
5. **Virginia War Memorial.** The JLC requests that the Governor and General Assembly ensure Virginians who have given their lives in battle, as well as all military veterans, are honored by optimizing the operations, maintenance, and program delivery at the Virginia War Memorial and its new Paul & Phyllis Galanti Education Center. An additional \$255,000 (GF) per fiscal year is needed.
6. **In-state Tuition for Veterans.** The JLC requests that the Governor and General Assembly increase educational opportunities for recently-discharged veterans by waiving the one-year residency requirement needed to qualify for in-state tuition rates, provided all other domiciliary requirements are met.

## **JLC Position Paper: Alternate Dedicated Revenue Sources for Veterans Programs**

1. **OBJECTIVE:** Provide some of the resources required to implement the Compact with Virginia's Veterans by creating alternate dedicated revenue sources for veterans programs.
2. **BACKGROUND:**
  - The cost of taking care of our veterans has increased exponentially in the past decade. However, the Department of Veterans Services' budget has been cut by \$1.4 million over the last two years and several programs currently are severely underfunded.
  - Over the next 10 years the cost of veterans programs (e.g. Virginia Wounded Warrior Program needs, cemetery maintenance, care center operations, benefits services) will continue to increase.
  - A 2010 JLARC study recommended a multi-pronged approach to reduce and prevent veteran homelessness in Virginia. Some of the recommended strategies, especially those that will make the greatest difference in reducing chronic homelessness, will require significant funding – as much as \$3-10 million. JLARC recommended that the General Assembly consider designating a revenue source to reduce veteran homelessness.
  - Legislation enacted in 2010 would establish a Compact with Virginia's Veterans, with a goal of making Virginia America's most veteran-friendly state. New programs and services implemented under the Compact for veterans and their families (e.g. homeless assistance, employment, education, etc.) will require additional resources.
3. **DISCUSSION:**
  - Veterans' service programs need a major, non-general fund "funding stream." It must be large enough to have a multi-million dollar impact on needed veterans programs that would otherwise require general fund monies or go unfunded. Funds need to be non-reverting and supplement, not replace, DVS budgeted monies.
  - Certain sources of alternative funding should be sought (e.g. grants and donations), but they are normally inadequate and not sustainable. Other possible sources may include certain types of vehicle registration or other fees; but many view them as a tax increase. Lotteries have been proven to provide a more suitable and sustainable source of revenue.
  - Seven states (Texas, Iowa, Illinois, Kansas, Tennessee, West Virginia, and New Jersey) have a dedicated revenue stream for veterans programs through the state lottery:
    - Texas received over \$6 million in the first 9 months of operation (\$9 million expected for the FY), Kansas - \$4 million, Illinois - \$7 million; Iowa – almost \$3 million;
    - These states have been successful in designing a lottery that does not detract from funds dedicated to education or other purposes;
    - Rather than cut into a share of the "pie", they have been able to "grow the pie."
  - The proceeds from the Virginia lottery are dedicated to education and so protected by the state constitution. However, some proceeds can go to other uses if approved by 4/5 of the members of the General Assembly.
  - No other group in America has been called on to bear the burdens and to make the sacrifices that our veterans have. Therefore, they alone deserve this tangible token of Virginia's appreciation.

4. **RECOMMENDATION:** That the General Assembly and the Governor approve the establishment of a veterans' lottery as part of the Compact with Virginia's Veterans.

## **JLC Position Paper: Restore Staffing for DVS Benefit Services Program**

1. **OBJECTIVE:** To improve services to Virginia veterans by restoring staffing for the DVS Benefits Services Program.
  
2. **BACKGROUND:**
  - The Code of Virginia sets a ratio of 1 Veterans Claims Representative for every 26,212 veterans residing in the Commonwealth.
  - Support and training personnel are also needed in order for the Veterans Claims Representatives to effectively assist Virginia's veterans and eligible dependents.
  - The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that 822,312 veterans resided in the Commonwealth in September 2010, meaning that the Commonwealth should have 31.4 Veterans Claims Representatives.
  - In the past two years, seven mission essential positions were lost to budget cuts, reducing the number of Veterans Claims Representatives from 32 to 28. These four positions, as well as two support positions and one training position, remain unfilled due to budget limitations.
  - §2.2-2004.10 states in part that the Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Veterans Services has the duty to "... *recommend to the Governor ... and the General Assembly any corrective measures, policies, procedures, plans, and programs to make service to Virginia-domiciled veterans and their eligible spouses, orphans, and dependents as efficient and effective as practicable.*"
  - §2.2-2004.17 further states that the Commissioner shall "*Establish and implement a compact with Virginia's veterans, which shall have a goal of making Virginia America's most veteran-friendly state.*"
  
3. **DISCUSSION:**
  - The DVS should, at a minimum, be capable of providing the level of support required by the Code of Virginia. This support includes Veterans Claims Representatives, support staff, training staff, facilities, and equipment.
  - Four Veterans Claims Representative positions, two support positions, and one training position are currently vacant because of the budget cuts.
  - Compensation (\$236,714) and Benefits (\$120,689) for the seven vacant positions total \$357,403.
  - FFE to open two new offices is estimated to cost \$15,000.
  - Rent for the new offices is estimated to total \$30,000 annually.
  
4. **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Governor and General Assembly amend the current biennial budget by appropriating \$402,400 for FY 2012 to restore DVS Benefit Services Staffing.

## **JLC Position Paper - State Veterans Cemeteries**

1. **OBJECTIVE:** To ensure that state veterans cemeteries operate in a safe, efficient manner and meet national shrine standards by filling vacant positions, replacing worn out equipment, and purchasing necessary supplies.
  
2. **BACKGROUND:**
  - Funding for the state veterans cemeteries in the past has not kept up with their growth in burial numbers and gravesite/headstone maintenance requirements. That load is expected to increase as the projected number of veterans aged 65 and older increases from 247,173 from 2009 to more than 295,000 by 2017 and federal veterans' cemeteries increasingly are not accepting new burials.
  - The cemetery total annual operating budget is about \$811,000, which has not increased over the past several years. These funds came primarily from two sources: approximately two thirds is state general funds (GF), about one third is from non-general fund (NGF) veterans burial plot allowances received from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (\$300 for each veterans burial).
  - The cemeteries largest single operating expense is employees pay and benefits. However, three positions are vacant and need to be filled.
  - Operational equipment replacement funding is needed for 12 year old and more recently obtained equipment that is worn out or starting to wear out.
  - Directional signage and grounds supplies (grass seed, fertilizer, etc.) are needed to maintain the cemeteries at National Shrine Standards and as the number of burials increase, the need for supplies increase.
  
3. **DISCUSSION:**
  - Funding is required for two authorized unfilled employee positions at the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery (Suffolk) and one unfilled position at the Virginia Veterans Cemetery (Amelia). Cost: GF \$101,500 (FY12 and ongoing).
  - Funding is required to make up shortfall in operating budget for Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery (Dublin). Cost: GF \$85,000 and one additional position (FY12 and ongoing).
  - Funding is required for 12 year old equipment replacement at Amelia and equipment wearing out at Suffolk. Cost: GF \$60,000 and \$20,000 respectively (FY12 and ongoing to a lesser degree).
  - Funding is required for installation of road/highway directional signage posting in both directions on one major interstate, two roadways and four ramps at Dublin. Suffolk and Amelia need signage upgrading. Cost: GF \$32,000, \$26,000, and \$13,000 respectively (FY12).
  - Funding is required for grass seed/fertilizer. Cost: GF \$16,000 (FY12 and ongoing).
  - Funding is required for an employee overtime fund to have an employee available in each cemetery on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays throughout the year to assist families with locating grave sites, assist with the placement of flowers, handling cemetery flags. It would include having full staff available to support holiday recognition events. Cost: \$33,600 (FY2012 and ongoing).

4. **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Governor and General Assembly provide additional funding of \$387,100 in FY12 to operate Virginia's Veterans Cemeteries.

## **JLC Position Paper: Special Judicial Procedures for Veterans and Military Service Members**

1. **OBJECTIVE:** To help veterans and military service members who have been charged with a crime by allowing localities to establish special judicial procedures. These procedures would emphasize use of available treatment options as an alternative to incarceration and would benefit veterans, military service members, and the community.
  
2. **BACKGROUND:**
  - Military service entails high costs to service members and their families. In addition to the risk of death or physical injury, service members, especially those in combat, face situations that place them under extreme mental stress.
  - Physical injury or combat can lead to post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injury, alcohol or substance abuse, homelessness, unemployment, and strained relationships in the home and in the community. Some of these conditions may not manifest themselves for months or even years after a service member has returned from a combat zone or after a veteran has left military service.
  - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) – severe manifestations of mental illness and head or brain injury, respectively – have been called the “signature injuries” of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also affect veterans and military members from all periods of service.
  - Mental illness and injury arising can create conditions that bring veterans and military service members in contact with the judicial system.
  
3. **DISCUSSION:**
  - Unique resources and treatment options are available through federal, state, local, and private agencies, providing effective alternatives to incarceration.
  - Allowing communities to treat some veterans and military service members, rather than incarcerate them, would help them receive the unique care they need to recover from their unique injuries. It would also give them a second chance to resume their honorable place in our society and not be a burden to the community. The veteran or military service member, his/her family, and society will benefit.
  - Experience in other states has proven that veterans and military service members respond very favorably to judicial procedures where they feel respected and understood for their unique circumstances and needs.
  - Based on recommendations from General Assembly members, the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program has implemented an education program for judges, lawyers, and law enforcement officials. While this is a good start, special judicial procedures are still needed to ensure veterans and military service members receive the help they need to resume an honored place in our society.
  
4. **RECOMMENDATION:** The JLC recommends that the Governor and General Assembly enact legislation that would authorize (but not require) localities to establish special judicial procedures for veterans and military service members.

## **JLC Position Paper: Virginia War Memorial**

1. **OBJECTIVE:** To ensure Virginians who have given their lives in battle, as well as all military veterans, are honored by optimizing the operations, maintenance, and program delivery at the Virginia War Memorial and its new Paul & Phyllis Galanti Education Center.
2. **BACKGROUND:**
  - The Virginia War Memorial (VWM) is a unique, highly visual “showcase” for Virginia, possessing national recognition as an impressive shrine to those who served in defense of our freedom. This makes it unique from many other state facilities in its operating, maintenance, and program delivery expenses.
  - The VWM is situated on over four acres, having significant lawn and related landscaping maintenance requirements. Other high maintenance-related features at the VWM include: a large reflecting pool, an eternal flame, ten flag poles, the Memory statue, an impressive 32-foot high glass and stone “Wall of Honor” engraved almost 12,000 names of Virginians who died in defense of our nation, and the new Education Center. The Memorial and its grounds require special attention to their appearance befitting such a shrine.
  - The opening of new Education Center will allow the VWM to play a major education role for veterans, teachers and students, out of state visitors, and all Virginians. New educational initiatives and programs will help visitors develop the leadership, values, and sense of responsibility needed in America’s citizens.
  - During the year, the VWM hosts a number of patriotic programs and an array of interesting speakers. The VWM also serves as a meeting place and spiritual home for Virginia’s veterans service organizations, and is a focus of activity, memory, and honor for the entire Commonwealth.
  - The highly visible programs and new Education Center place added service-delivery and maintenance demands on Virginia’s nationally-recognized VWM.
3. **DISCUSSION:**
  - It is essential to properly maintain the VWM’s operations and appearance and adequate funding to continue its role of serving Virginians, veterans and their families, students, and other national/international visitors in the image desired by the Commonwealth and its citizens.
  - Increased funding of \$122,000 is needed for operations and maintenance. Education and special events for the new Education Center require increased funding of \$133,000.
4. **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Governor and the General Assembly provide an additional **\$255,000** (GF) per fiscal year for the operation, maintenance, essential appearance needs, and education programs of the Virginia War Memorial.

## **JLC Position Paper: In-State Tuition for Veterans**

1. **OBJECTIVE:** To increase educational opportunity for recently-discharged veterans by waiving the one-year residency requirement needed to qualify for in-state tuition, provided all other domiciliary requirements are met.
  
2. **BACKGROUND:**
  - The Code of Virginia, § 23-7.4, sets a one-year residency requirement and other domiciliary requirements in order to qualify for in-state tuition rates.
  - Provided all other conditions for establishing domicile are met, an exemption to the one-year residency requirement is available for:
    - Active duty military personnel;
    - Retired military personnel residing in the Commonwealth at the time of their retirement;
    - Dependent spouse or children.
  - Dependents of active duty, or of Guardsmen and Reservists on active duty, can continue to attend at in-state tuition rates, even if the parent is transferred.
  - 11,864 veterans are projected to leave the military in the year ending September 30, 2010 (source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs).
  - The Post-9/11 G.I. Bill gives veterans a great incentive to earn a college degree. The Post-9/11 GI Bill will pay:
    - Tuition & fees directly to the school not to exceed the maximum in-state tuition & fees at a public Institution of Higher Learning;
    - A monthly housing allowance;
    - An annual books & supplies stipend of up to \$1,000.
  
3. **DISCUSSION:**
  - Waiving the one-year residency requirement for veterans would allow veterans to attend a Virginia public college or university at the in-state tuition rate.
  - This in turn would encourage service men and women who separate from the active duty military, the Guard, or the Reserve, to attend a public college or university in Virginia upon separation, instead of seeking educational opportunities out of state or delaying entry into a program of higher education until Virginia residency is established.
  - If the veteran attends a Virginia college or university, he or she is more likely to remain in the Commonwealth after graduation, enhancing the economy of the Commonwealth.
  - Waiving the one-year residency requirement for veterans will help make Virginia “the most veteran-friendly state in the nation.”
  
4. **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Governor and General Assembly grant veterans an exemption to the one-year residency requirement for in-state tuition, provided all other domiciliary requirements are met.

## JLC Legislative Objectives 2005–2011

The table below provides a “snapshot” of the JLC Legislative Objectives from 2005 – 2011. Where possible, objectives are “grouped” to categorize initiatives by functional area or theme.

Objective	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
State Veterans Cemeteries (including operational funding, establishing the Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery, and Burial Vaults)	√	√	√		√	√	√
Virginia War Memorial (including Education Center, Programs, and Security)	√	√	√	√		√	√
DVS Benefits Services Program (including Claims Agents and TurboVet)	√		√	√	√	√	√
Guard and Reserve Programs (including recognition for service and Military Family Relief Fund)	√		√	√	√	√	
Veterans Care Centers (establishing Hampton Roads Veterans Care Center)	√	√	√				
Veterans Preference in State Government	√		√				
DMV issues (including drivers license renewal and vehicle registration)	√	√					
Education Programs for active duty, families, veterans, survivors and dependents (including in-state tuition and Interstate Compact)		√	√		√		√
Alternate Revenue Source for Veterans Programs		√					√
State funding for Fisher House at McGuire VA Medical Center		√					

<b>Objective</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>
State Tax Exemption for Active Duty or Guard/Reserve serving overseas			√	√			
Credit/financial issues (including PayDay Lending and Credit Freezes)			√	√			
Virginia Wounded Warrior Program				√		√	
Tax Relief for 100% disabled veterans				√	√	√	
Homeless Veterans Study					√		
Special Judicial Procedures for Veterans and Military						√	√

### **Non-Legislative Initiatives**

- Establish Program for Unclaimed Veterans Cremains
- Construct Northern Virginia Veterans Care Center

## **JLC Links to other Boards/Councils**

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