



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Veterans Services

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Commissioner

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Virginia Department of Veterans Services Update for the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations March 21, 2024

Ladies & Gentlemen,

It is a privilege to deliver my first update to the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (the JLC) as Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Veteran Services (DVS). It conjures a very similar feeling of purpose, pride, honor, and challenge to my nearly 30 years of service. Like those days, we work with a committed and trained team anxious to serve others. In this case, we serve our nation, but more specifically our brothers and sisters in arms – our Veterans, their families, their survivors, and our service members soon to be transitioning to a new career, and hopefully a new and successful life journey.

In my short two months aboard, I have seen many challenges that face our Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF).

The industry that supports Veterans is large, complex, and difficult to navigate. I can imagine that it would seem exhausting and discouraging to all of us. We have accepted as our mission to take this on, every day. We at DVS will work to help make it work for our SMVF.

While our veterans have earned benefits for your service, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is still working with old technology and processes (appointments, telephones, and one-on-one meetings & interviews). I can only imagine how many failed calls, hang-ups, or times put on hold can be tolerated.

The Commonwealth of Virginia has invested in the Virginia Department of Veterans Services to directly aid our SVMF through their needs. We are working hard to deliver new technologies and programs to expedite the timelines to get support. We are working on a better transition assistance program to coach and mentor transitioning service members and their spouses through career change, education, and training. We have experts that work with them to prepare benefits claims for what I believe is the highest success rate in the country.

We have a focused team of professionals trained on services facing the most distressed in our Veteran community: addiction counseling, suicide prevention options, avenues to access low-cost housing and to transition from homelessness to permanent supportive housing, food, clothing, and reintegration after

time in jail or prison. We help our SMVF navigate healthcare and access to a broad range of providers across the state and nation.

BUT, we can't serve and support our SMVF if we don't know them. Here in Virginia, like most states (and the federal VA), it is assessed that roughly 30% of our veterans, let alone family members, are known. So, in this first report to you, I want to share later this spring DVS will be unveiling a new portal called the Virginia Veterans Network that will connect our SMVF to:

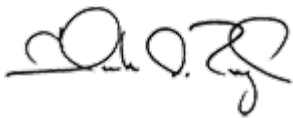
- Thousands of Vet-friendly businesses, healthcare providers, and services;
- Programs that honor our history, Servicemen and Women;
- Veteran directed community programs across the Commonwealth;
- New capabilities and service offerings at our skilled nursing facilities, VA hospitals, and community-based outpatient clinics;
- Podcasts that explain our programs how you can leverage them for your benefit; and
- Upcoming events at our memorials, cemeteries, and museums.

We want our SMVF to know specifics on the new services we are working on, and the new laws and policies our Governor and our General Assembly are working to help our entire military and veteran community. Registering in this new portal will give us the opportunity to do just that while connecting our SMVF to additional statewide resources.

In ending, I look forward to getting to meet and speak with you and the VSOs you represent over the coming weeks, months, and years. While I am familiar with your honored history, I want to know you. We at DVS want to know you. We want this to be a forum for you to give us your feedback; the good, the bad and the ugly. Only then can we truly see you and your members ... and serve you.

My commitment to you is that we will work every day to serve you and your families. We will listen to understand you and your experience, and especially your frustrations. We will listen to you to measure our successes, but also our areas for improvement. For those who have not been served well, we will work to re-earn your trust. And we will never fail to give our best.

Thank you for your significant service to our Nation and may God bless you, your families, and your loved ones.



Charles (Chuck) Zingler
Commissioner