

THE AMERICAN LEGION



Remarks for HVAEP and House Aging & Older Adult Services Public Hearing

August 28, 2018

Good Morning, my name is Bruce Foster, I manage the American Legions Veteran Outreach Program for Pennsylvania veterans. On behalf of James R. Vollrath, State Commander of The American Legion I want to thank you for allowing me this opportunity to discuss Pennsylvania Veterans. I will keep my comments brief.

(My colleague here from the Veteran of Foreign Wars may have forgot to mention that other organizations such as the TAL, DAV, AMVETS, VVA and MOPH all do Veteran Outreach across this great state to the best of their abilities and budgets.)

You know, I find it fascinating the way the VA estimates the veteran population but here is what it tells us. On September 30th, 2018, just over a month from now, our Pennsylvania veteran population will drop below 800,000 for the first time in over a century. To some this might seem like a good thing, as we will have less veterans to have to care for, so it should cost less, right? However when I add that over 55% of these 800,000 Pennsylvania veterans are age 65 and older it might open some eyes that we have some urgency in expanding outreach programs that change lives every day. If you knew that we had 122,327 veterans who are between ages of 70 & 74, would that convince you we need action now, Or that another 74,122 who are between the ages of 75 to 79, would that be the decider in your mind or would it take the 146,000 veterans who are over the age of 80 to see how urgent our problem really is. Folks, Our veterans and their families need Long Term Healthcare solutions, home healthcare, and assisted living. The partnership between the State and the VSO Grant program is a proven success story. Data provided by the VA, not us, proves that, Act66 does pay for itself many times over in not only revenue but the savings it generates with medical savings through Medicare and Medicaid. It took our Governor and State legislators four budget years to add an increase to Act 66 funding after maintaining level funding for 8 years.

I want you to consider a simple situation, one that we will all be faced with one day, and that is as we age our need to preserve the resources that we put away while we were working increase greatly. Veterans and their families face this same situation every day. Family's struggle with finding the resources to care for their parents, grandparents and great grandparents. Veterans are very proud individuals, you often hear them say they are not looking for a handout, or it should go to someone who needs it more than them, or they don't want charity. But I can tell you from experience when a few more dollars means the difference between putting a loved one in a private assisted living facility instead of a Medicaid nursing home just by using the benefits they earned while serving their county, now that is a good day. VA Pension benefits can help veterans and their spouses live in higher, more independent levels of care arrangements for a much longer period.

You should understand that the VA is the second largest bureaucratic federal agency. It is run by rules, regulations and laws. Title 38 of the US Code outlines the benefit laws and is our lesson book. Internally the VA uses an M-21 & M21-1 Procedure Manual to keep its decisions consistent. I tell you this story because it's these same rules, regulations and laws that make so many veterans and their families eligible for benefits. Now the VA does not go out of its way to advertise they have money and benefits to give away, using a trained accredited representative will ensure success and receipt of the maximum available benefit.

The VSO Grant program has literally helped thousands of Pennsylvania veterans receive benefits when they need them the most. Every time we enroll a veteran in the VA Healthcare system your State Budget should go "Cha-ching", another one we won't have to save Medicaid dollars for, everyone who we obtain Service connected benefits for is just another one you won't have to fund long-term Healthcare for. We support legislation that will increase funding for Act 66 in the most expedient way. We have long supported the idea of using the Lottery system as a bill payer for Act 66. We need to know more about the VGT Bill before we are ready to commit to it but the Pennsylvania War Veterans Council will study the idea when we start back up in September.

In closing I just want you to consider one more situation, imagine how many widows of Vietnam Veterans there are in Pennsylvania whose husbands passed away years ago from what is now considered a Presumptive condition related to Agent Orange exposure. Conditions such as respiratory Cancers, leukemia, Ischemic heart disease, Parkinson's and do not know they are eligible for both compensation and healthcare benefits and are totally unaware of it. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak this morning.

Notes:

Population data – USDVA VetPop2016