

House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness

Good afternoon, Chair Evans, vice-Chairs Boone and Esquivel, and members of the House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness.

Thank you for allowing me to provide information on behalf of Oregon Veterans. My name is Eric Ensley and I am the President of the Oregon County Veteran's Service Officer Association. I am providing this information today as president of this Association and not as the supervisor for Multnomah County Veterans Services.

As many of you may already be aware, the issues surrounding veterans and their families are as extensive as they are broad. Most of the concerns veterans have are based not only on the scarcity of resources but also the lack of adequate access to information that provides a gateway to federal VA benefits, as well as state and local resources. County Veterans Service Offices have been poised to expand our services and create awareness of county programs to include veterans and with the partnership and support through the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs, we are strengthened (county and state): unified in filling claims and providing advocacy for our veterans.

Although each of our Oregon Counties' approach to community engagement is varied, we all speak with Veterans who face very similar barriers accessing federal, state and local benefits. From housing to healthcare and disability claims to transportation, the issues are broad. So, it is equally challenging to narrow the gaps between services without collaboration between state and local partnerships.

For example:

The Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs is the appointed service organization that County Veterans Services Offices operate under. With their oversight, we are able to be representative agents before the federal VA for our Veterans.

The Association of Oregon Counties is a group of Oregon County Commissioners with a mission to act as a collective voice for Oregon Counties to provide the best possible services to our veterans and their families. The CVSO relationship is that we get to inform AOC of the overwhelming needs of the veterans we serve within our respective counties directly to our elected local County Commissioners.

Veterans Services and "Who we Are"

The goal of the Veterans Services Office is to provide benefits information, assistance and advocacy to all who have served and their families. Many Veterans are unsure of their entitlement to benefits so we ask that anyone who identifies as having served to contact our offices to be directed to an appropriate resource. The Veterans Services Office provides services and help with the following benefits:

Services offered through the Veterans Office:

- Comprehensive VA benefits counseling
- Assistance with VA healthcare enrollment
- Claims preparation and submission
- Claims follow-up to ensure final decisions
- Initiate and develop appeals when appropriate
- Networking and advocacy with federal, state and local agencies
- Justice involved outreach

Types of VSO claims activities include:

- Filing compensation (service-related injuries or disease).
- Re-open compensation claim for increase or re-evaluation.

- Dependency and Indemnity Compensation for survivors (based upon service-connected disability or death).
- Non-service-connected pension (for war era veterans only).
- Death pension (for survivors of wartime era veterans only).
- Admission to the Oregon State Veterans Homes (Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs).
- Request for military records and decorations.
- Discharge upgrade and correction of military records.
- Vocational Rehabilitation.
- VA home loan guarantee and ORVET (Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs).
- Education benefits (VA).
- Disability life insurance and waiver of premiums
- Payment of proceeds of VA life insurance.
- Burial benefits (VA).
- Medical care/dental care at VA facilities.
- Assists eligible veterans with state and local education fee waivers and benefits.

We provide information and referral for the following:

- Inter-agency referral to assist veterans and their surviving spouse for placement in LTC facilities
- Public assistance referral
- Veterans Affairs medical care
- Homeless issues
- Transition assistance counseling through Oregon Employment Department
- Certification of discharge papers (DD-214) for filing claims with the VA.

What is needed? Additional resources to continue expanding our geographic reach to more veterans.