

STATE OF COLORADO

DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

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September 20, 2023

County Commissioners and Administrators,

This correspondence is a supplement to the Veterans Services Performance Audit update sent on July 5, 2023. In that update I provided the progress made by the Division of Veterans Affairs in addressing the key findings as outlined in the Veterans Services Performance Audit of September 2022. This audit provided in depth analysis, assessment and recommendations that were categorized in six key areas: VSO Training; Accreditation; Data Security; Support Payments to Counties; Deploying Division Resources to Help Ensure Uniform Service; and Strategic Planning and Governance.

The division recently published its Policies & Procedures Manual, dated July 1, 2023, which provides written policies and procedures for appointment, training, certification and accreditation of VSOs; managing and securing sensitive data; processing of support payments to counties; deploying division resources to help ensure uniform service; and strategic planning and governance. I would like to ensure your situational awareness and understanding of how the division, with the assistance of the counties, will be implementing recommendations associated with CVSO appointments, accreditation, data security, support payments to counties and deploying division resources to help ensure uniform service.

Appendix B (Appointment Memorandum) of the Policies & Procedures Manual outlines the compliance requirements for appointing County VSOs per C.R.S. 28-5-802. CVSOs must be a resident of Colorado and an honorably discharged Veteran or an LGBT veteran per statute. Boards of County Commissioners must seek the advice and counsel of the chief officer of each post of the regularly established and existing veterans' organizations of the county wherein the officer or assistant is to serve as to the qualifications and experience of the applicant for the position. The appointee must be well-qualified based on the appointee's education and experience to perform the duties of county veterans service officer. The division recommends a bachelor's degree and a minimum of two years serving Veterans.

Regional VSOs will assist County VSOs in obtaining VA Office of General Council (OGC) accreditation within 180 days of employment. Applicants for accreditation must be a county employee working no less than 1,000 hours annually; successfully complete CDVA 30-60-90 training; and successfully

complete VA TRIP training. Upon meeting the above eligibility requirements, Regional VSOs will submit the VA 21 to OGC for accreditation. Upon accreditation, the Regional VSO will provide the County VSO with the VA checklist for Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS) access. The VBMS serves as an electronic database of veterans' claims files and is an essential tool for all VSOs in providing prompt and efficient services to all veterans across Colorado on a uniform basis.

All users of DVA IT resources will read and acknowledge receipt of the division's Acceptable Use Policy (Appendix F) prior to accessing DVA IT resources and annually thereafter via the division's Learning Management System (LMS). All VSOs and supporting staff will read and acknowledge receipt of the division's Rules of Behavior (Appendix G) within their first 30-days of employment and annually thereafter via the division's LMS. Personal Identifiable Information shall always be safeguarded by adhering to all rules, policies and procedures defined in (Appendix H). All VSOs have an initial and annual requirement for PII training via the division's LMS. VSOs who access the VA remote desktop must complete new hire and annual PII and Privacy Act training via the VA training portal. Counties will only use state-approved claims management systems for storing veterans' personal information. Counties are responsible for notifying Regional VSOs of CVSO terminations to facilitate timely deactivation of accounts.

The Veteran Services Performance Audit found that the division's two payment rates each year, one for full-time VSOs and one for part-time VSOs, led to counties receiving divergent levels of state support (\$8.65 per hour to \$55.38 per hour), which did not clearly promote the uniform service provision. In a manner to address this disparity in payments and to promote uniformity of support payments for CVSO services provided across the state, the division has implemented an hourly pay rate in consultation with the Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs. The CVA-26 Monthly Report (Appendix A) will be used to document monthly hours worked by CVSOs. Counties will submit a County VSO Payment Application (Appendix K) semi-annually (January/July) IAW C.R.S 28-5-707. Hourly rate will be determined by dividing moneys appropriated by the general assembly for CVSOs by total CVSO hours worked across the state. For example: \$1,340,381 (moneys appropriated) / 133,120 (total CVSO hours worked across the state) = \$10.06 per hour. The hourly rate will fluctuate according to moneys appropriated and total CVSO hours worked across the state.

The division is in the process of expanding from five to seven regional field offices which are projected to be fully operational by December 31, 2023. These additional offices, coupled with additional county VSO allocations, will assist in reducing the Veteran to VSO ratio in our higher density populations. It is anticipated that additional state and county VSO resources will be needed to achieve the division's goal of reducing veteran appointment wait times to two-weeks or less and responses to inquiries in two business days or less. We are pleased to report that the division increased its capacity to serve our state's veterans with our recent addition of a Women's VSO Coordinator who will be assisting and serving women and other underrepresented populations across the state. The division now has a dedicated Training Specialist to assist with the training and certification of County VSOs across the

state and is in the recruitment process for a Claims & Benefits Supervisor, VSO Liaison, Appeals Assistant, and Grants Assistant.

We are confident that the division is better postured and prepared today to move forward in furthering prompt and efficient services to all veterans across Colorado on a uniform basis. Together we will make a difference in ensuring our veterans receive the highest levels of service and assistance. Your voice, partnership and support will be essential to our mission success. I appreciate your efforts in serving our Colorado Veterans and making a difference in the lives of the veterans we serve. "One Team! One Fight!"

Respectfully,

David Callahan

David Callahan

Director

Colorado Division of Veterans Affairs

Cc: Chair, Senate State, Military, and Veterans Affairs Committee

Chair, House State, Military, and Veterans Affairs Committee

County Commissioners

County Administrators

Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs

County Veterans Service Officers of Colorado

United Veterans Coalition of Colorado