



ARIZONA VETERANS' SERVICES ADVISORY COMMISSION

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November 16, 2021

Douglas A. Ducey
Governor

The Honorable Douglas A. Ducey
Governor of Arizona
1700 West Washington Street
Phoenix, AZ 85007

COMMISSIONERS:

Dear Governor Ducey,

Joan B. Mcdermott
Chair
Military Officers Association of America

Eugene C. Crego
Vice-Chair
Unified Arizona Veterans

Kathy Gallowitz
Veterans of Foreign Wars

Wyn C. Gibbs
American Legion

Lt Col Edward C. Logan
Air Force Association

Major Kirk Loving
Military Order of the World Wars

Mike Noble
Marine Corps League

Rebecca Villalpando
Daisy Mountain Veterans

On behalf of my fellow commissioners, we want you to know that we appreciate your support for Arizona's veterans that has resulted in positive changes in the past year. The approval for the hiring of an additional 12 Veteran Benefits Counselors (VBC's) will lead to quick, efficient, informed responses and elimination of backlogs to get veterans the services to which they are entitled. An exceptionally high percentage of older and disabled veterans in the northwestern part of Arizona clearly needed the addition of a veterans' home; your support has led to approval for a home in Mohave County. Your support and final approval of an income tax waiver for retired servicemembers provides welcome relief, honors our veterans' service, and will make Arizona more attractive as a place to live, ultimately bringing a financial benefit to our state.

The commissioners request your support and are providing you with policy advice related to veterans and their families in accordance with Arizona Revised Statute 41-602. This letter will address educational requirements and restrictions, the need to identify veterans and their family members by agencies that provide them with services and regulation, and a request that the outstanding services of the Arizona Department of Veterans Services and the Arizona Veterans Services Advisory Commission be approved to continue for an additional 8 years.

In-State Student Status: In-state tuition for veterans under A.R.S. 15-1802 limits their ability to enroll in a course at a public institution of higher learning to within 3 years of military discharge. We request that consideration be given to removing the 3-year requirement. Complicating the requirement are confusing and conflicting residency requirements. The Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. (P.L. 116-315[Sec. 10051]) leaves Arizona out of compliance. The waiver granted by the Veterans Administration will end on July 31, 2022. The state will then be out of compliance, adversely affecting education programs under the Post-9/11 and Montgomery GI Bill at public institutions of higher learning.

Arizona Purple Heart Veterans and Tuition: We recommend that the stipulation that Arizona veteran residents who were residents of Arizona or were stationed in the state when the injury occurred, have been awarded a Purple Heart citation, have a disability rating of 50% or more and have been convicted of a felony, should be made eligible for a tuition waiver scholarship. There are categories of veterans who are felons who qualify for education benefits, as for those at residential reentry centers, for example. Mental health challenges like PTSD must be taken into consideration. Your executive order, establishing the "Second Chance Box", extended to these veterans, would give them an opportunity to have a better life and would benefit their communities. Finally, removing this restriction will help the Arizona Department of Veterans Services (ADVS) carry out its Strategic Plan.

Identifying Veterans and Families: Commissioners ask that you consider supporting a requirement that agencies in Arizona which provide services, benefits, licensing, and regulation add a question asking, “Do you or do you have a family member who ever served in the military?” to intake forms and processes. The agencies would then provide contact information for ADVS and the Be Connected program to people who responded in the affirmative. There are still way too many veterans and families that are unaware of the services and benefits for which they would qualify. Commissioners have had personal experiences in some areas of the state with the positive results when local agencies made the effort to identify these citizens. The benefits accrue not only to the individual veterans, but to the community in which they live.

Arizona Department of Veterans’ Services and Arizona Veterans’ Service Advisory Commission: Finally, the commissioners strongly support approval for the extension of the Department and this Commission for an additional 8 years. The Department has been extremely effective in Arizona in consistently improving services for veterans. Their outreach to every corner of Arizona and their creative and flexible development of programs that create ways to meet the needs identified in the Strategic Plan are unfolding every day, providing an example for every other U.S. state and territory. And the Commission plays an essential role. The nine commissioners are veterans who live across Arizona and work with or volunteer in a wide range of veteran organizations. They not only provide daily ‘eyes and ears’ for the Department to help identify problems veterans are experiencing in local areas, but also help to educate their veterans regarding services and information about changes affecting them.

Sincerely,



Joan B. McDermott
Chairman
Arizona Veterans Service Advisory Commission