



ARIZONA VETERANS' SERVICES ADVISORY COMMISSION

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Katie Hobbs
Governor

The Honorable Katie Hobbs
Governor of Arizona
1700 West Washington Street
Phoenix, AZ 85007

COMMISSIONERS:

MEMORANDUM

Subject: Strategic Policy Objectives and Legislative Ideas That Address the Prevailing Issues Facing Arizona's Veterans and Their Families

Kathy Gallowitz
Chair
Veterans of Foreign Wars

I. Employment: Veteran underemployment is a significant challenge - reaching nearly 35%. To address this and other employment challenges, we recommend the following:

Philip D. Cushman
Vice-Chair
Veterans of Foreign Wars

- Expand employer outreach and education about Veteran-hiring and retention best practices.

Charles Byers
Commissioner
Active or Retired Military Personnel

- Continue supporting the Arizona Coalition for Military Families (ACMF) Career Navigation, Arizona Veteran Supportive Employer designation and the Department of Defense SkillBridge programs.

Eugene C. Crego
Commissioner
Unified Arizona Veterans

- Promote "AZHiresVets" to increase Veteran hires in state and local government from 8.5% to 15%.

Wyn C. Gibbs
Commissioner
American Legion

- Create hiring preferences for able and disabled Veterans in state and local government jobs.

Matthew J. Kenney
Commissioner
American Legion

- Draw native Arizonians home after completing military service and emphasize their value and necessity to our future prosperity.

Kirk A. Loving
Commissioner
Military Orders of the World Wars

- Provide 3% state contract set asides for Arizona Veteran-owned businesses.

Andrew P. Meshel
Commissioner
Air Force Association

- Consider moving the following programs that provide employment assistance for Veterans from the AZDES to the ADVS: Disabled Veteran Outreach Program (DVOP) and the Local Veteran Employment Representatives (LVER). Your Commission contends that this will more effectively integrate, coordinate, and promote accountability of their Veteran employment assistance.

Michael D. Noble
Commissioner
Marine Corps League

Your Commission requests your advocacy for the following Veteran Employment Legislative ideas:

- Attract Military, Veteran, and Spouse Talent to Arizona's Workforce: This is a vital economic development imperative. This talent will help narrow workforce shortfalls created by low availability and high demand for workers and the up-skilling required of tomorrow's workers. Arizona must be proactive and creative in establishing Arizona's

National Veteran Talent Pipeline - making it possible for more Veterans to strengthen our workforce and use their federal benefits and other income here, not elsewhere.

- Create the State's Veteran Employment Council: Arizona spends billions on workforce initiatives to ensure our labor force pipelines are adequate for anticipated growth yet no workforce or economic entity focuses on attracting or leveraging Veteran talent within the civilian workforce. A new employer-led Council would maximize "in-demand" career opportunities for Veterans and make recommendations for resolving workforce and other significant post-military transition issues facing service members, Veterans and their spouses. It would also foster accountability for responsive and effective Veteran job seeker career services with minimal "red tape."

- Broaden Employer Veteran Hiring and Retention Best Practice Training: This is important because many employers want to hire and retain Veterans but most do not know how to do it well; that is, they don't know how to find, interview, onboard or retain Veteran talent. The result is nearly 35% Veteran underemployment - missed opportunities for both the employer and Veteran. Expanded employer training will enable companies to more fully leverage Veteran skillsets and become stronger, more productive organizations.

- Incentivize Small Business and Local Governments to Hire Veterans: Many small businesses and local governments are facing hiring shortages that could be solved by hiring unemployed or underemployed Veterans. These small businesses and local governments lack the resources and infrastructure that many large corporations and State entities use. With the right incentives and support, small companies and local governments can attract and hire Veterans across Arizona, especially in rural communities. Removing the obstacles to hiring Veterans will ensure that the small businesses and local governments, that produce over half of Arizona's gross domestic product, stay viable.

- Expedite Transition of Military Medics into Civilian Healthcare: Nearly a third of Arizona hospitals are facing chronic personnel shortages, especially in nursing. Expediting the transition of military medics and corpsmen into civilian nursing, specialty care, and medical administration will help relieve these labor shortfalls. We recommend expanding accelerated trainings and other specialized solutions for military medics to help them safely and quickly become civilian healthcare workers.

II. Education: While Arizona ranks in the upper third of the nation in the number of Veteran students attending higher education, the graduation rate at community colleges has been astonishingly low. The reason seems to be a lack of support for student Veterans who are challenged by their family responsibilities, jobs, service-related disabilities, transitioning difficulties, gaps in culture and experiences compared with other students, plus the administrative burdens that leaves no room for error or schedule conflicts. Your Commission recommends:

- Increasing the number of certified Arizona Veteran Supportive Campuses to ensure Veterans understand their educational benefits and receive necessary support.

Your Commission requests your advocacy for this Veteran Education Legislative idea:

- Funding the Purple Star Schools Program: We should do more for the 35,000 military children living in Arizona that attend our public, private and charter schools. The average military child enrolls in six to nine schools during their K-12 education, potentially

adversely affecting them both academically and socially. Establishing Arizona's Purple Star Schools program will encourage schools to better support military children through school transitions and when their parent(s) are deployed. This program also transmits a strong and clear message that Arizonians want military kids to be a part of their communities.

III. Facilitate Access to Services and Support: Given the complexity of benefits, the number of Arizona Veteran residents who are potentially affected, and the resultant financial gain in federal funding available to augment state revenues and economies of scale, it is in the best interest of both Arizona and Arizona's Veterans to provide proactive assistance in accessing earned benefits. Your Commission recommends the following:

- Require State agencies who provide services/benefits and/or regulation and licensing bodies to ask every individual at the initial point of contact, "Have you or a family member ever served in the military?" Include the question on all intake forms and require the applicable agencies, commissions and boards to provide the website address and contact information for the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services and the Be Connected Community Network program to individuals who answer "yes."
- Distribute Sixty-two (62) Veteran Benefit Counselors across the State with twenty (20) earmarked for Tribal and rural areas. Ensure the budget is protected for these counselors and that rigorous training and career ladders are reliably funded.
- Provide ongoing support to the Be Connected Community Network, a public/private partnership under the umbrella of the Arizona Coalition for Military Families. This important network connects Veterans, service members, and their families to the right resources at the right time, advancing responsive upstream suicide prevention.
- Build a 5th State Veterans' Home in Mohave county and initiate long-term planning and feasibility studies for future State Veterans' Homes in other rural areas of Arizona.
- Emphasize understanding and addressing the needs of disabled, women, Native American, other Veteran subgroups, and rural Veterans.
- Construct and operate a temporary lodging facility similar to the Fisher House near the VA Medical Centers in Phoenix, Tucson, and Prescott to provide a "home away from home" for families of Veterans receiving medical care.
- Build capacity, support and assist in implementing the goals, strategies and objectives of the Arizona Veteran Homeless Action Plan.
- Monitor and address transportation barriers for Veterans seeking VA healthcare; especially from the rural and remote regions of Arizona.
- Protect and grow the Cemetery Trust Fund to provide for operation and maintenance of state cemeteries in perpetuity, in the absence of state funding.

Your Commission requests your advocacy for the following Veteran Access to Services and Support Legislative ideas:

- Fund the Star Behavioral Health Provider Program: This program will increase access for military service members and their families to licensed behavioral health professionals with specialized training in military culture and treatment, both important suicide prevention strategies.

- Provide Memorial Grants for Private Municipal Cemeteries: While Veterans have an option to be buried in one of the State’s several Veteran cemeteries; many choose to be buried in the municipal or private cemeteries in their hometowns or near their families. Often these locations lack adequate infrastructure to perform dignified services. Memorial grants for simple items like flagpoles, lighting, and memorial plaques will ensure that Arizona respectfully recognizes the service of our deceased Veterans.

IV. Expand Veterans Courts Across Arizona: The rigors of current and past conflicts and the growing recognition of the impact of post-traumatic stress on our Veterans, presents a growing need to differentiate between treatable mental health issues and punishment within our courts’ systems. The ten (10) Veterans Courts throughout Arizona ensure that Veterans receive fair treatment and services through carefully monitored court ordered rehabilitation and counseling to overcome the ill effects of service-related problems such as post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injuries. Your Commission recommends:

- ADVS continue providing financial assistance to the Veterans Courts for start-up and operating costs.
- Build awareness about the benefits of Veterans Courts, establish more of them, and broaden adoption of best practices.
- Further engage the larger civilian legal community in support of Veterans.



Kathryn L. Gallowitz
Chair, Arizona Veterans’ Advisory Commission
Rio Verde, Arizona
Veterans of Foreign Wars