



ARIZONA VETERANS' SERVICES ADVISORY COMMISSION

3839 North 3rd Street, Suite 200, Phoenix, AZ 85012
Tel: (602) 255-3373 FAX: (602) 255-1038
Website: www.azdvs.gov

November 19, 2024

Katie Hobbs
Governor

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

COMMISSIONERS:

Dear Governor Hobbs:

As you approach the end of the second year as our Governor, your Arizona Veterans' Services Advisory Commission continues to provide you and your Staff the best, most informed, non-partisan advice on policy issues involving your Veteran constituents and your Arizona Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS). Since 1951, your Commission promoted public awareness and enhanced the well-being of past and present Arizona Service Members, Veterans and their Families. This broad mission is articulated in A.R.S. §41- 602, "The Commission shall provide policy advice to the Governor and the Director of Veterans' Services regarding Veterans' issues."

Summarized in the attached memorandum, is your Commission's strategic policy objectives and legislative ideas that address prevailing issues facing Veterans and their families. We are pleased to report that after consultation with your policy planning staff that these objectives align with your priorities. These are loosely grouped into five themes:

- I. Promote sustainable employment, talent development and the economic security of Arizona's Veterans
- II. Improve Veterans' access to mental, physical, spiritual, and legal support
- III. Ensure Access to Affordable Housing and Services
- IV. Improve Educational Outcomes for Veterans and their families
- V. Monitor, Evaluate, and Influence How Water Shortages and Immigration Policies affect Veterans

We continue to recommend that your administration place a high priority on Veterans' issues. As you and your Staff circulate our State, acknowledging and recognizing Veterans demonstrates that that they are an important part of our community and reinforces your connection to them. Veterans are powerful economic, financial and social influencers that positively shape Arizona's workplaces and communities. Indeed, research shows that Veterans strengthen the workforce and community. With more than 500,000 Veterans living in Arizona, it is estimated that nearly \$2.5 billion dollars comes to the state from federal Veteran benefits.

As noted, the economic impact of Veterans spending from their disability compensation, pensions, educational benefits, military retiree pay and Veterans' Employment funding is considerable. We can help Veterans by amending Proposition 130 to raise the income thresholds for property tax exemptions for Veterans and their survivors. To boost our economy and enhance business productivity, we propose expanding efforts to educate Arizona's employers on best practices for hiring and retaining Veterans. **A second...**

There are several emerging issues and concerns that your Commission will be examining over the next year:

First, we are concerned with the dwindling number of Commissioners currently on your Commission. By statute, we can have nine. We currently have seven of which three have serious health issues and three may term-limit out. One challenge is the slow onboarding process that all your Commissions have due to personnel shortfalls in the Office of Commissions. The slow process is a barrier and limits your ability to attract highly qualified candidates and get them into effective and influential leadership positions. Your Commissioners are contacting qualified candidates throughout the State to ensure a bench of candidates exists for your Commission. However, resolving the slow nomination and administrative processes will not only improve your ability care for Veterans and their families but improve the advisory capacity of your other Commissions as well. Perhaps a formal invitation to potential candidates from the Office of Commissions would help.

Second, we are concerned that the resources provided to the Veteran Treatment Courts could be reduced to the point that they will be either closed or reduced to the point of ineffectiveness. This will most likely affect the rural and tribal regions of the State before the urban areas. Your Commission will be monitoring the Veteran Courts across the State during the year to determine impact of funding reductions. Veteran Treatment Courts are highly impactful in reducing recidivism in Veterans involved in the criminal justice system, reaching 80% graduation rates. While your Commission monitors the Veteran Courts, your support of HB 2652 Establishing the Justice Involved Veteran Study Committee is an important step in keeping the Veteran Treatment Courts resourced.

Pro Bono legal services for civil issues

Elderly suicides from losing their home

Third, we are very concerned how Gun Violence affects Veterans. Your Commission will be exploring this serious issue. This controversial issue must be dealt with dignity, sensitivity, and tact with due respect to Constitutional rights and prudent safety measures. Your Commission will conduct a listening tour with the Commanders leading Veteran Service Organizations and will support the gun violence prevention efforts led by the Arizona Coalition for Military Families.

Fourth, we are concerned about the budget cuts affecting your Commission. Previously, we received ~~business cards and travel reimbursements~~. Now, we must cover travel costs ourselves, and even when we offered to pay for business cards on our own, they were not provided. Arizona's vast size makes travel expensive for Commissioners who represent the Veterans community. This unpaid volunteer role should not be limited to those few wealthy individuals who can self-fund, as it reduces the diversity and value of our advice to you. It would be inappropriate of us to seek funding from our sponsoring Veteran Service Organizations since we are operating in an official capacity defined by statute and their funds should be used to support Veterans in the Community. In the meantime, your Commissioners will continue to self-fund due to the importance of our statutory responsibilities to the Veterans distributed across Arizona.

Fifth, ...

In conclusion, your Commission is your brain trust on all concerns affecting the Veteran community and we are proud to be on your team. The seven members of your Commission represent Congressionally Mandated Veteran Service Organizations and reside within one of the three Veterans Administration regions within Arizona. Your Commissioners have served our Nation with distinction while in the military and

afterwards; continuing their extraordinary service to all Arizonians. They have meaningfully served their communities as elected or appointed officials, industry leaders, small business owners, board members, advocates and are solvers of difficult problems. Enclosed please find the biographies of your Commissioners to provide insights into their qualifications, abilities and influence.

In addition to our responsibilities to you, we advise Cabinet Executive Officer Dana Allmond of the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services in the execution of her duties which includes the supervision of Veteran Benefits Counselors (VBC); the management of the State Veterans' Homes and State Veteran Cemeteries; services to Women Veterans and other Veteran subgroups; and planning ceremonies and memorials honoring Veterans. Most important, we advocate for projects that address the needs of Arizona Veterans and endorse pro-military/Veteran legislation. We welcome an opportunity to meet with you in person to discuss your priorities and legislative ideas. We are eager to partner with you to address them.

Thank you for supporting Arizona's Veterans!

Philip D. Cushman

Chairman, Arizona Veterans' Services Advisory
Commission Quartzsite, Arizona

Enclosure (1): Arizona Veterans' Services Advisory Commission Strategic Policy Document

Enclosure (2): Biographies: Members of the Arizona Veterans' Services Advisory Commission