



Joint Veterans Organization

Statement on the proposal to split DMAVA

On October 10, 2017 then candidate for NJ Governor Phil Murphy proposed a stand-alone Department of Veterans Affairs for the State of New Jersey.

Currently, New Jersey's Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMAVA) is responsible for the management of both the National Guard and veterans' services. Some on Governor Elect Murphy's transition team claim this impacts the services delivered to veterans. The major veteran service organizations dispute that claim and believe the current structure of DMAVA is efficient and successful in providing services to our 410,000 veterans.

Governor Elect Murphy also promised to expand an already existing veteran's diversionary court program. This may be premature as S307 / A4362 which created the Veterans Diversion Program was passed on May 1, 2017 and took effect on December 1, 2017. The program, a joint effort between the Attorney General, the Administrative Office of the Courts and the Adjutant General, is not up and running statewide yet but is available in several counties.

The Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs is responsible for the support and coordination of various services to military veterans in New Jersey including Outreach and Assistance, Veterans' Haven, Burial Services, and the three Veterans' Memorial Homes. The department operates over 16 veteran service offices throughout the State. These offices assist veterans and their dependents in securing State and federal benefits. Evaluation data indicates that the department will serve an estimated 91,000 veterans in FY 2017; provide 24,000 veterans' transportation trips; provide 20,000 post-traumatic stress disorder counseling sessions; house 190 homeless veterans; process 9,000 claims; and perform 3,084 burials.

SERVICES TO VETERANS

The Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs is responsible for the support and coordination of various services to military veterans in New Jersey. These responsibilities include:

1. Long-Term Care Services. The department operates veteran's nursing homes in Menlo Park, Paramus and Vineland. These facilities provide nursing home care for eligible veterans, their spouses, and parents of individuals killed in action. Eligibility requirements for veterans include an honorable

discharge and two-year State residency preceding the date of application. The three nursing homes have a rated capacity of 948 beds. They all currently have a 100% occupancy rate.

2. Burial Services. The department provides New Jersey veterans, their spouses and dependents with burial services at the Brigadier General William C. Doyle Veterans Memorial Cemetery which continues to be the busiest state operated veteran cemetery in the country and the 11th busiest among all federal and state cemeteries.

3. Veterans Outreach and Assistance. The department operates 16 veterans' affairs services offices throughout the State. These service offices assist veterans and their dependents in securing State and federal entitlements. The department also provides community-based services through third-party contracts for transportation and post-traumatic stress disorder counseling. DMAVA communicates with the veteran's organizations and other government agencies about its services and outreach.

4. Veteran's Haven provides transitional housing, long term rehabilitation services and employment training for 190 homeless veterans a year.

- DMAVA operates the Vet to Vet Hotline and a benefit hotline
- The Guard and Veterans Affairs support the Stand Downs with troop support, use of armories, logistics and veteran service officers. The Department also allows veterans organizations to utilize Guard facilities for programs.
- DMAVA awards medals to NJ veterans
- DMAVA conducts Veteran Outreach Events almost monthly
- DMAVA administers the Education Tuition Assistance Programs, Homeless Veteran Grant Program, PTSD Program and a statewide Veteran Transportation Program.
- DMAVA maintains the states 3 major War Memorials in Homdel, Trenton and Atlantic City.
- Assists in the Veterans Court Diversion Program

The FY 2017 Governor's Budget provides \$10 million in State funds, the same as in FY 2016, for veterans' outreach and assistance, Veterans' Haven, and burial services. The budget also reflects continued federal funding of \$10 million for continued improvements to the Brigadier General William C. Doyle Veterans' Memorial Cemetery including the realignment of grave markers and the rehabilitation of graves as well as the planning, design, and construction of additional in-ground burial site sections.

The FY 2017 Governor's Budget recommends funding of \$78.4 million to continue operation of veterans' memorial homes and support an average of 920 resident veterans in the budget year, essentially the same level of funding and service as in FY 2016.

Currently DMAVA, Guard and Veteran Affairs, share a HQ and conduct some veteran outreach from Guard Armories.

Our position is that the current Department of Military and Veterans Affairs is an efficient and well managed asset to our veterans, Guard personnel and citizens. We must ensure that any split of DMAVA does not negatively impact the quality of services to our state's 410,000 veterans nor the quality of life or operational readiness of our Guard personnel.

There will be both immediate and long term costs involved with any split of the Department and we strongly object to any of those costs coming from budget cuts of any program that benefits veterans or Guard personnel. The Department currently has joint human resources which provide quality personnel management, technical expertise, and customer-focused service in support of the Department's mission. The Human Resources Division functions as a support division for all central personnel transactions and provides human resources analysis, guidance, and information in support of all department state programs and activities. They also have a joint administration, and support services which comprise the planning, management and operation of the physical assets of the Department and its subordinate activities including veterans' memorial homes, armories, buildings and equipment, as well as alteration, expansion, construction, rehabilitation and improvement, and custodial services. There are also joint Honor Guard support services.

Two separate Departments will require two bureaucracies, two headquarters, each with its own budget, which eliminate any savings currently in place under a joint Department. One estimate claims the cost to be 2 million dollars annually. Again we must ensure that any increased costs do not negatively impact our veterans or Guard personnel.

Currently the Adjutant General and his staff meets with the leaders all of the veterans organizations twice a year at his "Commanders Call". The meetings consist of discussions of the status and successes or shortcomings of Guard operations and veteran programs. The General also presents the proposed budget for DMAVA and asks for our support. We believe our continued support of a joint Guard / veteran DMAVA budget is a major factor of its passing every year.

The Deputy Commissioner and his staff visit the major veteran's organizations headquarters twice a month to discuss any issues concerning veterans. The Deputy Commissioner oversees the veteran side of DMAVA. The Deputy Commissioner position has traditionally been filled by a person who has had years of service and advocacy for our veterans, is known to and worked alongside of the major veterans organizations and has a knowledge of the complexities of the veteran benefit system, private, organizational, state and federal. If the current Deputy Commissioner is to be replaced, we strongly encourage that person be a resident of the state and have a strong veteran's advocacy management background.

We want to ensure that our Memorial Nursing Homes, Vet Havens and other programs remain exclusively for veterans, their spouses and Gold Star parents, and are properly funded to maintain the high quality of care the residents currently receive. We want to ensure the General Doyle Cemetery remains exclusively for veterans, spouses and dependents, is maintained in its current pristine condition and staffed by a National Guard Honor Guard to honor the sacrifices made by our veterans.

Any split of DMAVA will increase costs and our membership will not allow those costs to be incurred by New Jersey's veterans in the way of decreased services or increased Memorial Home reimbursements.

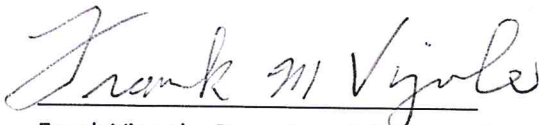
The veterans service organizations listed below believe there can always be improvements in the services provided to our veterans. We are aware of the needs of our veterans and have worked alongside DMAVA and the other veteran organizations to fulfill those needs. Our organizations have fought and advocated for our veterans in Trenton and Washington D.C. since 1899 to ensure our sacrifices made are not forgotten and promises made by our elected officials were kept. We stand together and strongly oppose any changes to DMAVA without a thorough review and input from all of the major veteran's organizations.



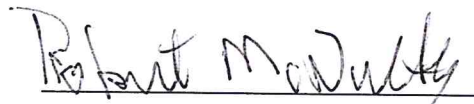
Darryl Reid, Department Commander
The American Legion



Carey Pritchett, Department Commander
Veterans of Foreign Wars



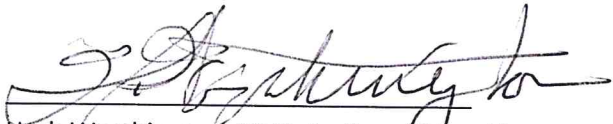
Frank Vignola, Department Commander
Disabled American Veterans



Robert McNulty, Legislative Chairman
Fleet Reserve Association



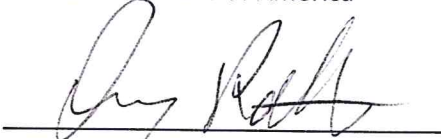
Al Adler, Department Commander
Jewish War Veterans



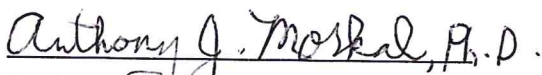
Herb Worthington, NJ State Council President
Vietnam Veterans of America



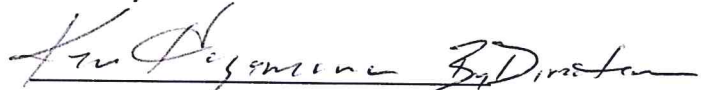
Joseph Belardo, Department Commander
Military Order of the Purple Heart



Doug Rattazzi, Department Commandant
Marine Corps League



Anthony J. Moskal, Department Commander
Catholic War Veterans



John P. Dorrity MSW - CVA
NJ Association of Veterans Service Officers