



THE EAGLE



THE MILITARY OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA PENNSYLVANIA COUNCIL OF CHAPTERS

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STILL SERVING



NEWS AND VIEWS February 2015

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

February brings the beginning of activity in the legislative session with committees holding information hearings with state agencies in advance of the budget hearings that will start in March. These hearings give the agencies the opportunity to tell the committees what their agency has been doing and what they want to do in the coming year. It gives the committees a better idea about what the agencies will want to fund when the budget hearings start. The committees also give related groups that provide similar services the opportunity to present their views on how the state agency is helping the Commonwealth's citizens and how the committee and the agency can assist them in their goals. The Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee held an information hearing with the Pennsylvania

War Veterans Council whose testimony also spoke for the Pennsylvania State Veterans Commission on February 25th at the capitol. Mr. Bruce Foster, PA American Legion, is chairman of the War Veterans Council legislative committee and read the testimony. The testimony is included in this newsletter under state legislature. The Pennsylvania War Veterans Council and State Veterans Commission will be testifying again for the House Veteran Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee on March 24th at 1 pm at the capitol in room G-50 of the Irvis House office building.

Respectfully,

Bob Gray

Visit the Council web site:
www.pa-coc.org .

COUNCIL MEETING DATES 2015

Council meetings will be held at the Carlisle Country Club in Carlisle, near Carlisle Barracks, in the Harrisburg area on Saturdays at 11:30 AM. Legislative meetings will start at 11:00 AM for spring through fall meetings. Lunch is available.

April 25, July 25 (MOAA Staff Visit by Barry Wright, COL USA (Ret), and October 24. All MOAA members are welcome to attend these meetings.

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PENNSYLVANIA LEGISLATURE

Bob Gray Legislative Chairman

The PA War Veterans Council Legislative Committee was asked to provide testimony on the issues it sees are helping veterans and what they feel needs to be done to improve how veterans are treated and funded. Below is the testimony presented to the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee on February 25th, 2015. The testimony was prepared and read by Mr. Bruce Foster, PA American Legion, chairman of the legislative committee. He is also the former director of the PA American Legion's full time service officers.

Testimony given by Bruce Foster, Chairman of the PA War Veterans Council Legislative Committee, a member of the American Legion, on February 25, 2015 to the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee at the Capitol, Harrisburg, PA. Good afternoon Chairman Vulakovich, Chairman Costa and all distinguished members present. On behalf of the Pennsylvania War Veterans Council, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to share with you issues we feel important to veterans of the commonwealth both young and old.

Annually the Pennsylvania War Veterans Council establishes its legislative goals and the State Veterans Commission either adapts or modifies those goals as their own. This vote will take place at the next scheduled meeting of the Commission however Chairman Brenner has authorized me to include his remarks in today's testimony because it was unclear if he would be able to testify separately because of his surgical procedure performed just yesterday.

Today's veterans joined the military for a number of reasons, answering the call to duty, taking a stance against terrorism, education and monetary benefits, personal satisfaction, pride, family tradition, honor, learning new skills, self improvement and many other reasons. Veterans of my age group and older may have had some additional incentive from their local Selective Service Office.

Regardless, Pennsylvania veterans became veterans by serving their country at the federal level and rightfully the federal government is responsible to offer the largest share of benefits to care and recognize the service of veterans, dependents and their survivors. We at the state level have authorized our own array of benefits under Title 51 PaCode. The greatest challenge we face is ensuring our diverse veteran population of almost a million veterans, geographically located in all 67 counties are continually and I repeat the word continually, aware of benefits they are eligible to receive. Some of these benefits such as transition assistance, healthcare, counseling, employment assistance and education benefits are needed shortly or immediately following service. Other benefits such as service connection for injuries or illnesses may or may not arise for years following service because of unknown exposures veterans faced during their military service. Veterans suffering from Post traumatic stress, those facing homelessness, long term unemployment, all need immediate assistance. VA Pension, aid and attendance may not be required until late in a veterans golden years and many of our aged veterans know nothing about the program today. Burial and Memorial benefits are the end of the benefit cycle for the veteran and the beginning of Dependents and survivors benefits. It seems eligibility standards and procedures change

almost daily based upon decisions from the Court of Veterans Appeals, internal VA rule changes, and congressional actions. A few examples are effective January 1st of this year the VA eliminated the asset rule for enrollment in the VA Healthcare system. This change opens the door for many previously denied or never applied veterans whose assets were too high to enroll. The Department of Defense is currently reviewing the records of all veterans separated from the service for issues related to mental health. This review will lead to discharge changes and eligibility for many veterans who were previously ineligible. Presumptive conditions are continually added to the list of conditions recognized for service connection. My point is veteran outreach is a never ending process.

Studies conducted from 1991 to 2015 all conclude Pennsylvania lags behind other states in receipt of benefits. However we cannot change history. Pennsylvania lags behind other states because our outreach has been ineffective, underfunded and understaffed for decades. For the most part the approach has been we are willing to do anything for veterans as long as it doesn't cost anything. We understand budget constraints but also know the positive impact veterans benefits have on society as a whole. We disagree with the 2015 Veterans Needs Assessment Report and Summary conducted by Penn State when it states the Commonwealth generally has the capacity, programming and personnel to adequately care for the needs of its veterans. We do agree that Communications and Integration of services are huge problems in our state. We strongly recommend that your committee look toward the Texas Veterans Commission as a model of excellence in integration. We support the concept of having a Cabinet level leader of Veteran Affairs in Pennsylvania. Just as a small example, I tried last week to identify who are the current Veteran Employment Representatives in our state so that I could provide a list to our Outreach personnel. I think I have decent research ability skills but after more than an hour of searching I was unable to identify these representatives and I am sure a veteran could not either. Effective Outreach includes Claims representatives; Counseling,

Employment, Education and effective use of the Veterans Trust fund all working together to outreach.

In 2007, then Governor Ed Rendell, signed the VSO Grant program into law as Act 66 of 2007. This program has proved itself as an effective Veterans Outreach program. Annually, each participant is required to send a report to your committee of its effectiveness and results for the prior year. The number one legislative priority of the Pennsylvania War Veterans Council and the State Veterans Commission for the last eight years has been to properly fund this program. We were successful for five of these eight years to keep a separate line item in the DMVA Budget for this program. We always knew what was being appropriated and funded in the past to give us some security the program would continue. Now other programs are being funded under this same line item. If your Committee reviewed this line item you would conclude that funding has continually increased and wonder why we are asking for more funding. The truth is we have not increased our service officer wages since 2008. We simply cannot afford too. Our out of pocket organizational contributions toward the program continue to grow. We want to restructure our salary system but benefits, taxes, travel costs all continue to strain the program. It doesn't help that just since 2012, DMVA Outreach Service Officers salaries have increased on average 23% while those funded under the grant program have remained the same. A state employed service officer starting salary is currently \$45,066 while a VSO Service Officer starting salary remains at \$28,000. Please help us maintain a separate clean line item limited to funds appropriated to Veteran Service Organizations for the sole purpose of funding and training VA accredited Outreach Service Officers. Title 51, PaCode, Chapter 89 requires the State Veterans Commission to adjust the Rebuttable Presumptive level for Real Estate Tax Exemption every two years. The change is based on the change in the Consumer Price Index. We think it only fair to ask the Veteran Outreach program funding receive at least the same consideration. Please understand the whole purpose of this program is to provide

Outreach to veterans and more funding equates to more outreach. Much of our outreach is done in Legislative Offices and this partnership has proved very effective. Last year our committee supported Representative Barrar's bill on providing in state education rates to veterans and dependents who moved to Pennsylvania regardless of his/her former state of residence. With the passage of the federal Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014 we thought the issue was answered. However we continue to support HB 131 because Section 702 of the choice Act limits the rates to within three years of discharge. The time limit for most educational benefits under Title 38 USC is normally 15 years. Many veterans do not enroll in school immediately following discharge and we support the protection HB 131 offers them with no time limits .. Our committee continues to support a Veterans Lottery Ticket. A lottery ticket sold twice annually surrounding Veterans and Memorial Day. We understand Pennsylvania is the only state in the nation to use lottery funding for services that support its older residents. We simply feel veterans answered a call others did not and the proceeds from a veterans lottery ticket should be used specifically to the dignity, outreach and protection of older veterans. I promise you it would be a very popular ticket. HB 601 is a great starting bill.. The last two years The Pennsylvania War Veterans Council and the State Veterans Commission have taken an active role in fighting off changing existing laws on predatory payday lending in Pennsylvania. Payday lenders surround military bases throughout the nation. We have stood proud of many of our state legislators who held the line as lobbyists' have done their best to bring payday lending to our state. Its been a close battle and we fully expect it to continue but we will continue to circled the wagons in the veterans community to keep predatory lending laws some of the strongest in the Nation here in Pennsylvania. We support HB 175 extending the application period for the Persian Gulf War Bonus as our Outreach personnel continue to report finding veterans who are unaware of the bonus

program and funding remains. We support this extension with the caveat that it does not delay or extend the period we begin to work on a bonus program for Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation New Dawn (OEF/OIF/OND). We support HB 496 as a beginning for OIF/OEF/OND bonus program and hope the senate will take up this action as their own. We have heard it said that legislation being discussed surrounding the payment of a monetary bonus for this veteran group may be limited to a certificate or state medal. Today's veterans expect the same consideration afforded combat veterans who preceded them. Many states have already begun this compensation and we hope Pennsylvania makes every effort to recognize the service of these great Americans. In closing, again I would like to thank the Committee for providing us this opportunity to share our thoughts and goals here today. The Pennsylvania War Veterans Council and State Veterans Commission are more than willing to work with your staff on any legislation pertaining to veterans. In departing I ask that your Committee use its influence to erase the more than \$700,000 the Department of Military & Veterans Affairs is being charged by the Department of Transportation for the veteran's designation on Driver Licenses. When you pass a law with unfunded mandates one Department should not be able to charge another. It's funding that could better be used helping veterans. This concludes my prepared remarks.

Federal Legislation

MOAA Selected Legislative Goals for 2015

Active / Reserve Force/Family Issues

- Ensure active duty, Guard and Reserve force sizes meet mission requirements

- Sustain military pay comparability with private sector pay as required by law
- Protect currently serving and retiree benefits from severe, arbitrary sequestration cuts
- Credit all Post-9/11 active duty service toward Guard and Reserve early retirement
- Create new incentives for employers to hire and retain drilling Guard and Reserve members
- Restore tax deductions for reservists' out-of-pocket expenses for travel of 50 miles or more
- Create new incentives for employers/government/contractors to hire military spouses
- Protect funding for commissaries, exchanges, dependent schools and family support programs
- Ensure service sexual assault and suicide prevention measures provide positive outcomes
- Improve professional licensure transferability for service members and spouses
- Require better education on the financial disadvantages of the REDUX retirement option

Health Care Issues

- Avert a 24% Medicare/TRICARE payment cut and fix the statutory formula to improve care access
- Oppose means testing of TRICARE Prime and TRICARE for Life enrollment fees
- Block the consolidation of TRICARE health plans into a single plan providing less choice
- Improve seamless transition and protect Defense and VA health budgets/programs and benefits
- Authorize the option to retain operational reservists' civilian family health insurance upon call-up
- Increase orthodontia payment cap under active duty plan
- Authorize TRICARE coverage for Applied Behavioral Analysis for active and retired members

Retirement/Survivor Issues

- Evaluate Military Compensation & Retirement Modernization Commission recommendations; February 2015
- Oppose military benefit changes that are inconsistent with service career sacrifices

- Preserve full-inflation cost of living adjustments (COLAs)
- End the deduction of VA disability compensation from military retired pay
- End deduction of VA Dependency & Indemnification Compensation from Survivor Benefit Plan annuities
- Implement a more equitable military disability retirement system
- Restore VA Dependency & Indemnification Compensation for spouses who remarry after age 55
- Reform the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) calculation for reservists who die performing Inactive Duty Training
- Authorize survivors to retain a deceased retiree's full final month retired pay
- Reform the Uniform Services Former Spouse Protection Act (USFSPA)

Veterans / Other Issues

- Eliminate VA claims backlog and improve quality, efficiency and transparency of claims processing
- Improve VA healthcare services and access for women veterans
- Extend caregiver services and support to qualifying disabled veterans of all conflicts
- Authorize pre-tax payment of health, dental, and long-term health care premiums
- Prevent disproportional Social Security and Medicare penalties for any population segment



Reform, Don't Eliminate TRICARE

February 20, 2015 MOAA Legislative Update

A new report by the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) says that TRICARE is in "dire" need for reform in order to sustain the program. The report

coincides with recent proposals to transform pay and benefits by the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC).

Unlike the MCRMC's proposals, which would be a [seismic shift](#) in benefits to servicemembers and their families, the CNAS report calls for modest reforms to TRICARE. According to the report, "the core problem is that TRICARE's fee-for-service approach is subject to the same perverse incentive structures that have driven up health care costs in the United States by explicitly connecting payment to *volume* of care, not *value* of care."

TRICARE's fee-for-service reimbursement model has created volume-over-value thinking that has driven up costs without improvements in outcome or quality.

The report calls for DoD to follow the direction of agencies like the Center for Medicare and Medicaid and private insurers by switching from a fee-for-service model to a value-based model. By rewarding providers based on quality outcomes instead of quantity, TRICARE would be able to control costs.

"We've seen fee-for-value programs work successfully elsewhere," said MOAA's deputy director of government relations, Kathy Beasley, USN (Ret). "The Department of Defense should be more receptive to changes being made within the health care industry."

MOAA thinks that more can be done to reduce DoD's health care costs without adversely affecting beneficiaries. MOAA's put together [16 ways that DoD can save money](#) in health care.

MOAA will be testifying on health care before the Senate Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee on February 25.

- See more at:

http://www.moaa.org/Main_Menu/Take_Action/Top_Issues/Serving_in_Uniform/Health_Care/Reform_Don't_Eliminate_TRICARE.html#sthash.gn6SWIjw.dpuf

Commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War

As a Keystone Council member and US Senator Pat Toomey's State Director, I am pleased to share some exciting news. Senator Toomey will be taking part in a program designed to honor and commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War and all who served.

Senator Toomey and his seven state offices are Commemorative Partners with the Department of Defense in an effort to remember the service of Vietnam Veterans. The Commemorative Partner Program is a community and government outreach initiative designed to assist a grateful nation in thanking and honoring Vietnam Veterans and their families.

The objectives of the program are (1) to thank and honor veterans of the Vietnam War; (2) to highlight the service of the Armed Forces during the Vietnam War; (3) to pay tribute to the contributions made on the home front; (4) to highlight the advances in technology, science, and medicine related to military research conducted during the Vietnam War; and (5) to recognize the contributions and sacrifices made by the allies of the United States during the Vietnam War.

To honor those who served in defense of our nation, Senator Toomey will hold a number of events now through 2017. As such, he encourages the Chapter and members that wish to participate in these commemorative events or to volunteer their time to organize these events, to please contact me or Senator Toomey's Commemorative Partner Manager-- Frank Mazza, at (717) 782-3951 or via email at frank_mazza@toomey.senate.gov. Senator Toomey thanks you for your service and for all that you do on behalf of veterans everywhere. Help Senator Toomey honor those who served in Vietnam by letting

Senator Toomey know what you are doing to commemorate this Vietnam anniversary.

Robert J. DeSousa, COL, JA
Keystone Chapter

PA Council of Chapters Meets in Carlisle in 2015

Five Pennsylvania Chapter Leaders Attend MOAA Northeast Leaders Symposium at Dover Downs Hotel

MOAA national held the Northeast Leaders Workshop February 27-28 at the Dover Downs Hotel in Dover, DE. Fifty chapter and council members and their wives attended the quick paced leaders training on Saturday morning. There was still time to hear from chapter leaders about problems and solutions. The one lesson learned was that just because a chapter is near an active installation they don't have a problem getting members. They still have problems due to ops tempo and interests of junior officers.

Pennsylvania attendees were PA Council president and Keystone Capital Chapter president Bob Gray, Keystone Capital Chapter 1st VP Keith Beebe, PA Council 1st VP and Pocono Mountains/ N. E. PA Chapter member Bob Cudworth, President of the Pocono Mountains/N. E. PA Chapter Joe Albert and Cumberland Valley Chapter 1st VP Michael Zang.

One of the suggestions that were brought up was to change the chapter bylaws to allow spouses to hold office and chair committees. Auxiliary members were given full membership rights to hold offices by a vote of the entire MOAA membership two years ago. Chapters can take advantage of the spouse's talents and also let them hold office.





GLORIOUS INSULTS

He has Van Gogh's ear for music." – Billy Wilder



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PA COUNCIL OFFICERS 2014-2015 Term

President – Bob Gray
rl_gray@hotmail.com
(717) 623-8715

1st Vice President - Bob Cudworth
drrobert2@comcast.net
(570) 344-4609

2nd Vice President – Harold Cooney
Harold.Cooney@gmail.com
(717) 240-0428

Secretary - Nancy Anderson
LeadHers@aol.com
(724) 837-2784

Treasurer – John Whalen
whalenjohnf@yahoo.com
(610) 420-0633

Immediate Past President – Bill Harris
wthiii3@rcn.com
(610) 217-3511

PA MOAA chapters have 1,894 members and another 10,591 MOAA national members live in PA and are not in chapters. That means our total PA membership is 12,485 and climbing. Thank you for staying involved!

The Eagle is published monthly by the Pennsylvania Council of Chapters, Military Officers Association of America. Its content does not reflect the official position of the DoD, any branch of the US Armed Forces, NOAA, USPHS, nor MOAA National. Please send articles and audio-visual submissions to the Editor, Bob Gray, at pacocnewsletter@gmail.com.

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