



“
...CARE FOR HIM
WHO SHALL HAVE
BORNE THE
BATTLE AND FOR
HIS WIDOW, AND
HIS ORPHAN.
”

STATE AND LOCAL VETERAN'S SERVICE AGENCIES AND RETURNING VETERANS IN NEW YORK

Gerald Benjamin
Timothy Toomey



FOR PUBLIC POLICY INITIATIVES

Let's call him William Jones.

Bill was one of four graduates of Ellenville High School to join the military right after graduation in 2014. In Dutchess, Orange, and Ulster counties 305 others who left high school took the military route in that year. Fifty-three of these were from Ulster County: 11 each from Kingston and Saugerties, nine from New Paltz, six from Wallkill, five each from Highland and Onteora, three from Roundout, Valley, and two from Marlboro.

The percentage of eligible eighteen to twenty-four year old military enlistees in New York State (.7%) was among the lowest in the country in 2014.¹ But in Ulster County, the prospect of military service was more attractive. It was the home of almost five percent of New York's 6,347 military enlistees, just from among its 2014 high school graduating classes.

Bill wanted to be a Soldier for a long time. His dad, a corrections officer, was a Navy Veteran. His mom was a secretary in a local real estate office. Like two-thirds of the Army's enlistees, Bill Jones is white. He grew up with stories of patriotism and service told around the dinner table. Going back three generations to World War I, every man in the family had been a Soldier or a Sailor. He knew his grandfather who volunteered just after Pearl Harbor.

The Joneses' went with their son to the recruitment office in Kingston to sign his contract with the Army a week after his seventeenth birthday and he became part of the Army's Future Soldiers program. Bill reported to his recruiter monthly and was taught military customs and traditions in preparation for basic training. Fitness was emphasized. A starting forward on the varsity soccer team, when he was a junior Bill could do thirty-five pushups, forty-five sit-ups and run one mile in six minutes and thirty seconds.

Not all enlistees in the modern military are men. Women comprise about fifteen percent of those now in the service. If recruitment in Ulster County tracked this national pattern—admittedly a rough way of estimating—forty-five percent of the group from Ulster County joining the military just out of high school when Bill did were women.

It turned out that Bill Jones liked the Army and excelled in basic training at Fort Benning Georgia, the "Home of the Infantry." He qualified as an expert marksman and was near perfect on his physical fitness test. He came to be regarded by the other recruits and Drill Sergeants as "High Speed" and was made a platoon leader. After fourteen weeks Jones earned the Blue Cord of the infantryman (MOS 11Bravo). Bill was assigned to the 10th Mountain Division in Fort Drum, New York. Intensive counterinsurgency training followed to ready him and others in his unit for service in Iraq. He remained one of the best.

A few months later, Bill Jones found himself a member of the 1st platoon, Chaos Company, stationed near Baghdad, 5,958 miles from Ellenville.² A lot of the everyday work did not look like Bill's early mental picture of Soldiering. He provided security while commanders met with village elders and decided with them on building schools and funding other local needs.



Car bombing in in South Baghdad, Iraq

But there was a real war going on. Day in and day out, Bill's unit conducted patrols, sometimes jointly with Iraqi Police and Army units. Operating in an urban environment, platoon members had to be hyper-vigilant, constantly on the look-out for threats. It was a 360 degree fight; insurgents could launch successful surprise attacks from multiple directions. And then there were Improvised Explosive Devices (IED); planted in the roads, piles of garbage, and other seemingly benign locations, they could take out vehicles and maim or kill troops on the ground.

Stresses also came from home; technology assures that troops deployed to combat zones are far more quickly and readily in touch than ever before. One platoon member had his wife withdraw money from his bank account and file for divorce. As months passed, several others got "Dear John" messages or news that their boy- or girlfriends were not faithful. As these Soldiers struggled to focus on the tasks at hand, other platoon members sometimes shifted their attention from the mission to helping their buddy. Ripple effects were felt by the entire platoon and created vulnerabilities.

The thirty-nine member platoon lost five Soldiers in separate incidents. After one catastrophic IED strike, Bill's HMMWV served as a casualty evacuation vehicle and he saw the devastating effects of war on the human body up close. He can't forget them.

Bill was not wounded while in combat, but others from Ulster County's high school class of 2014 almost certainly were or will be. According the Department of Defense,

as of August 1, 2016, there have been 2,323 service members wounded in action from New York State in all overseas operations since September 11, 2001. Another ten to eighteen percent suffer with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder³ (PTSD), "a mental health problem that some people develop after experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening event, like combat, a natural disaster, a car accident, or sexual assault."⁴

According to the New York State Division of Veterans Affairs, New York's Veteran population was 834,526 in 2016.⁵ These Veterans, male and female, hailed from different backgrounds and traditions, serving in different branches and components of the armed forces during times of war or peace. Bridging their differences was the common ideal of service to something greater than themselves, notwithstanding the risk of permanent life-changing consequences. It was President Abraham Lincoln, speaking at his second inaugural, who famously defined the nation's reciprocal obligation to "...care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan."⁶

As of September 30, 2016, estimates by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics show that Bill will join the approximately 55,451 of these Veterans, men and women, living in the Hudson Valley region.⁷ Challenged or not by physical or psychological trauma, all who muster out would, of course, have to make the adjustment from military to civilian life. How well is the Hudson Valley prepared to support this adjustment, and the reintegration of Veterans into our communities?

Transition Programming

After a twelve month deployment, Bill returned to Fort Drum. He was approached to reenlist. Though he was not sure exactly what was next, he decided that he had done his part and would return to home and civilian life. Anticipating the need, the Department of Defense offered a transition assistance program (formerly TAP, then Transition GPS, now Soldier for Life) with elements both mandatory and optional, broadly focused on the

availability of health care, educational and employment opportunities.⁸ Bill attended a number of sessions during which he was counseled on a range of matters, including: the importance of keeping military records documenting service secure and available; transitional health insurance; financial and relocation planning; home loan assistance; available legal assistance; the nature of and qualifying for Veterans' Administration Services; training and educational opportunities provided by other federal agencies (the Department of Labor, the Small Business Administration); and the work of not-for-profits in support of Veterans.

The TAP program was a multi-agency effort launched in 1989 and fully implemented in 1991. Timely pre-separation counseling was required; orientation to employment and Veteran's benefits was optional. TAP was required by statute in 2011.⁹ It was replaced by Transition GPS in 2014; this new effort offered some components on-line and incorporated a focus on the development of social media skills for job seeking. A study published in 2016 showed that other causes for the change was the failure of TAP to systematically reach all those leaving military service, a lack of administrative accountability for the original program, and varying support for it from commanders in the field.¹⁰

There are similar, but less well developed, transition programs for National Guard members and reservists returning from deployment. These are reputed to face similar challenges. The Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program was authorized by Congress in 2008 to '...connect Guard and Reserve Service members, their families and loved ones with local resources before, during, and after deployments, especially during the reintegration phase that continues well-beyond the Service members' return home...[so that they may]... access information on healthcare, education, employment, and financial and legal benefits.'¹¹

As far as Bill Jones was concerned, the mandatory briefings provided too much information, delivered too fast, in a manner too hard to remember. In truth, Bill—focused upon “getting out and going home”—was likely not paying serious attention. As one analyst noted:

... [M]embers of today's military have many resources at their fingertips when they separate, but it's often incredibly overwhelming. Transitioning service members are trying to change careers, and may be moving themselves and families across the country, all while doing their day jobs up until terminal leave. Many service members may still be trying to figure out exactly what they want to do upon separation, while some change their minds. Others may have “bad paper” discharges and be trying to navigate what benefits they are and aren't eligible for.¹²

It's after getting home that the Soldier realizes that he or she needs assistance, and more precisely, what sort of assistance is needed. There is a risk, then, that he or she will fall into the hands of scammers or persons who are well-intentioned but ill informed.¹³ Not all advice is disinterested. Schools want the Veteran to spend his or her educational benefit with them. Lenders advise on VA mortgages. Older Veterans advising younger ones may not know current rules and practices.

One key is to seek out help from a person or place with VA accreditation.¹⁴ Still, there are literally dozens of potential sources of informed advice: service organizations accredited by the VA to offer guidance and/or assistance, attorneys or claims agents, also accredited, working on a fee basis to help with appeals, and state and local government offices.¹⁵

Reentry briefings while the Soldier is still on active duty do include an orientation to the services that state and local governments provide for returning Veterans. A general approach is impossible; every state is different.¹⁶ In New York, state law requires that extensive efforts are

made to assist all returning Veterans with employment, education and housing, with specially focused programs for those with service related disabilities and Veterans who have gotten caught up in the criminal justice system.¹⁷ Preference for civil service jobs is guaranteed in the state constitution. State law requires that localities offer Veterans partial exemption from property taxes. A recent priority has been to give added attention to the needs of increased numbers of women Veterans.

Many state agencies have a role in helping to reintegrate Veterans in civilian life. For one agency, this is the primary mission.

The New York State Division of Veteran's Affairs

The New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), established in 1945 as WWII drew to a close, has extensive powers and responsibilities under law to inform Veterans and their families about and connect them with the array of educational, employment, business development, health and mental health services available to them.¹⁸ The agency summarizes its work as "...advocating on behalf of New York's Veterans and their families, as individuals and as a group, to ensure they receive benefits granted by law for service in the United States Armed Forces." Reflecting growing diversity concerns, in 1994 the legislature required the establishment of a women's Veteran coordinator within the division to "serve as advocate for women. Further legislation passed five years later required that the Women Veteran's Coordinator be a Veteran (with preference given to a qualified woman Veteran), report directly to the director, and submit an annual report on agency activities to serve women Veterans."¹⁹

The state DVA has periodically faced operational problems. A 1998 audit by the New York State Comptroller found the Division to be poorly managed, bedeviled by outdated methods and practices and generally failing in its mission to coordinate federal, state and local Veterans' services. In response, new agency leadership took significant steps to assure improvement in operations, coordination and internal controls.²⁰ Still, a

decade later, the state DVA was left without a Director for the final seven months of the Pataki administration (in 2010); the vacancy persisted for more than half of the first term of the Cuomo administration. It was until recently headed by Eric Hesse, a retired Army colonel appointed to the post by Governor Cuomo in March of 2013. As required by law, the Division prepares an annual report that sets out its mission, provides summary statistics on New York's Veterans, and details division programs and direct services, new initiatives, work with other government agencies, important legislation enacted, burial supplements, Gold Star Parent annuities, and division activities pertaining to women Veterans.²¹

A 2015 summary by the State Comptroller found that in 2014-15 New York spent \$21.2 million on Veterans services and programs, about 60% of this (\$12.8 million) through the Division of Veteran's Affairs.²² According to the state budget, in 2017 the Division employed 85 people (down approximately 35%, from 127 in 1999) and had an annual state-funds budget of \$16,746,000. The agency managed an additional \$2,584,000 of federal funds. About a third of the total budget, \$6,380,000, was spent for blind Veteran annuity services. An additional sixth, \$3,042,000, was granted to localities.

State DVA managers note that the state budget "...includes all of the Aid-To-Localities member items over which...[it]...has no direct control. The correct operating budget for DVA for FY 15-16" it says, "was an appropriation of \$6,259,000 with a cash ceiling of \$6,338,000. The operating budget for DVA FY 16-17 was an appropriation of \$6,325,000 with a cash ceiling of \$6,171,000."²³

The division's largest expenditure was estimated by it to be \$5,457,724 for advising services.²⁴ Sixty-three benefits advisors (about three-quarters of the division's employees) are deployed across the state. The number of these DVA workers in field offices has been reduced 38% since 1998. Benefits advisors "assist claimants—whether a Veteran, spouse, child, or parent—in completing applications,

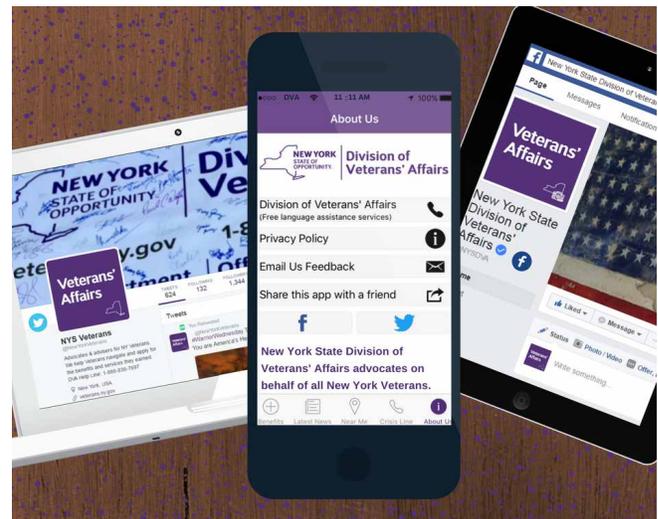
obtaining necessary documentation, and filing claims for a broad spectrum of federal, State, local, and private Veterans' benefits...working closely with other State, federal, local, and private agencies, appealing unfavorable rulings."²⁵

As noted, the DVA's primary work therefore overlaps with that of county departments and Veterans' service agencies, a potential source of friction. Multiple possible sources of advice to Veterans has been defended by one VSO as valuable for providing them "choice" from among potential advocates.²⁶ However, another VSO, a county Veteran's service agency head and former state division employee, decried the "...long history of in-fighting amongst Veteran's organizations, either membership based or government based."²⁷ DVA leadership reports efforts to achieve efficiency by redeploying staff to areas less served by accredited local VSOs. But local directors often perceive this as withdrawal of needed support.²⁸

In 2013, the Division of Veterans Affairs gained access to the Defense Personnel Records Information Retrieval System (DPRIS). It reported that this dramatically cut the time required to gain access to federal records essential to properly advising and advocating for the state's Veterans and their families.²⁹

New York State DVA Advisors are co-located within federal facilities in twenty-one places. In 2016, six of these state advisors were assigned to help meet the needs of Veterans in the ten Hudson Valley counties stretching from Westchester to Columbia and Greene.³⁰ (Two offered services in two localities.) In 2016, New York State Division of Veterans Affairs employees reported securing \$104,972,873 in claims awards to Veterans.

In accord with a legal mandate, the Division has developed an excellent phone application, available for both Apple and Android operating systems, summarizing government benefits available to Veterans.³¹ The app uses geolocation, assisting Veterans to find the closest DVA or County Veteran's Service Agency office and other state resources.³² It brings detailed benefit information to



Veteran's fingertips, potentially informing Veterans on benefits of which they were previously unaware. Detailed sections offer information on: advocacy and assistance, education, employment, healthcare, housing, and financial and compensation benefits. Points of contact and eligibility details are found within the aforementioned fields.

County Veteran Service Agencies

About three quarters of American states, New York among them, have made provision for county Veterans' service officers. The National Association of Veterans Service Organizations (NACVSO), an affiliate of the National Association of Counties, claimed in 2015 to represent a workforce of 2,400 members in twenty-eight states. NACVSO said that "between 75 and 90% of the claims presented to the Veterans Administration each year originate in a county Veterans office."³³

In New York, the provision of Veterans' service on the local level dates to the post-civil war period.³⁴ Initially, care of Veterans and their families was administered by the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), a politically powerful organization of Union Army Veterans that advocated for pensions and Veterans' homes. Starting in 1887, New York State law provided to cities and towns the power to care for Veterans through the GAR.³⁵ Gradually, this service was extended under Town and County Law to provide for burial and financial relief.

The authority to establish a County Service Officer dates to 1900.³⁶ County law now provides that a county may "create the office of county service officer to "...assist

members of the armed forces and Veterans and their dependents in obtaining any benefits and awards to which they may be entitled under any federal, state or local legislation.”³⁷ But the Executive Law, adopted more recently, mandates the establishment of county Veterans’ service agencies “...in each county not wholly included within a city..., with a director...who shall be a Veteran as defined in New York state statute.”³⁸ Cities may have such an office, but are not mandated to do so.³⁹ In counties with elected executives, Veterans office directors are their appointees; elsewhere they are appointed by the governing board.

Since 2013, as further discussed below, the law has required that county Veteran service officers acquire and maintain accreditation from the Federal Veterans Administration that authorizes them to “... assist Veterans and their family members in the preparation, presentation, and prosecution of claims for benefits....”⁴⁰ Thus this direct service delivery function is shared with state government. It is also shared with thirty-three national military and Veterans service organizations authorized by the VA to do this work.⁴¹

Local Veteran’s service agencies (VSAs) “have power under the direction of the state Veterans service agency” to assist members of the armed forces, Veterans, reservists and their families regarding the services available to them from all levels of government, calling as necessary upon other departments and agencies of state and local government for cooperation to do so.⁴² Their primary work involves helping Veterans qualify for U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs benefits. The three county offices visited for this study in the Hudson Valley, in Ulster, Orange, and Putnam counties all employ nationally accredited counsellors. However, Putnam County, in 2016, largely relied on biweekly visits by a state counselor based at the Castle Point V A hospital to advise veterans, though it reported state efforts to redeploy this resource.

Despite the letter of the law, many county directors—appointees of county executives or governing bodies—

have been resistant to the assertion of state agency supervisory authority. At a 2012 public hearing, Samuel J. Hall of Washington County, then head of the state’s county directors association said: “I think that there is a myth out there...that New York State Division of Veterans’ Affairs monitors us, and...is responsible for us in the day-to-day operational basis. That may be what the intent... was, but that’s not what happens.”⁴³ A recent audit of the Erie County agency found that monthly reports to the state were not filed for eight of the twelve months of 2015, and that those that were filed were inaccurate.⁴⁴ One state DVA official described its relationship with county agencies as “federal,” and subject to local discretion. For example, he said, about half the county agencies have a collaborative relationship with the state and submit monthly reports to it.⁴⁵

County Veteran’s agencies focused substantially on claims processing; they paid far less systematic attention to other aspects of seeking to assure a Veteran’s successful transition from military to civilian life. They do, however, regularly liaise with local chapters of Veteran’s membership and advocacy organizations, maintain a network of connections with agencies and programs outside of county government, and seek to link Veterans with available services and otherwise advocating for them. The Ulster County agency works to assist incarcerated Veterans. Additionally it is closely connected with the county’s community college through a shared employee; the relationship in the county with the SUNY New Paltz Veteran’s office in the county is less close.

County Veteran’s agencies also are sometimes direct providers of other services. For example, VSA’s commonly provide transportation for Veterans to VA hospitals. Orange County runs a Veteran’s cemetery, and Ulster a Veteran’s section in the New Paltz Rural Cemetery that is currently being further developed. Putnam is actively involved in suicide prevention efforts. Orange administers a food pantry for needy Veterans and their families. The three county agencies offer discount cards from local businesses for Veterans, an effort that not only provides a



Executive Michael Hein and roughly 200 elected officials, veterans, and community members gathered for the ribbon-cutting of Ulster County's Patriots Project, dedicated to transitional Veterans housing, July 2, 2014. Photo: <http://ulstercountyny.gov/Photos/24>

benefit but as a means of contacting persons who might otherwise not be in touch for services or support.

Putnam, Ulster, and Dutchess have been among the counties actively engaged in the national effort to alleviate homelessness among Veterans. The Putnam agency administers a twelve unit transitional housing facility. The Ulster County "Patriots Project" involved acquiring and, with broad community support, renovating a former assisted living facility located in a residential section of Kingston's Rondout District for transitional Veterans' housing. Eight Veterans may be accommodated at one time. There is 24-hour staffing; peer support and case management services are provided. Most residents, sixty-seven as of September 2016, have been men and Vietnam-era Veterans.⁴⁶

The Dutchess County's Division of Veteran's Services reports collaborative efforts with "the VA Housing Coordinator at Castle Point, the various Dutchess County departments, a local homeless housing partner, and a local not-for-profit mental health provider, as well as numerous other support agencies to provide a full complement of services that address Veteran 'homelessness....' The agency "...partnered with private developers to create 'Liberty Station,' which provides housing for individuals, and a women's Veteran home located in Poughkeepsie." Combined, these projects created more than fifty units of housing designated for Veterans.⁴⁷

Currently fifty-four of the fifty seven New York counties outside New York City have county Veterans' service offices. The exceptions are Chenango, Tompkins and Essex Counties. (There is a state office in Essex; state offices will be reopened in Tompkins and Chenango in 2018.) Agencies are variously administratively located within county government; this may be regarded as an indicator of the local priority given to serving Veterans. Many are free standing within the government. Others—in Nassau County, for example—are under a Human Services umbrella agency comprised of units serving specified elements of the county population. In Suffolk, Veterans Services are a unit within the County Executive's Office. As at the state level, Veterans are most often sought as agency employees to provide services to other Veterans and their families. Most county offices are modestly staffed. The largest, Suffolk County, has ten employees. One, in Schoharie County, is covered only part-time.

The total spent by New York's county Veteran's service offices in 2015 was \$14,576,639. (See *Table 1*)⁴⁸ Interestingly, in 2016 three of the five highest spending counties on Veteran's services were in the Hudson Valley. These were Orange, Ulster, and Dutchess. In general, as also shown in *Table 1*, these counties and others in the region also led in successful efforts on behalf of Veterans when measured by per Veteran county spending relative to per Veteran federal dollars generated.

Less than \$3 million of county resources devoted to their VSAs was from state aid. As shown in *Table 1*, the total local county own-source spending for Veterans in the state programs exceeded that of the DVA for direct service delivery. The Broome County Veteran's agency is exceptional in that it appears to be funded from a dedicated transfer tax. In addition to supporting routine agency operations, this provides the resources in that county to support a local grant program for Veterans' "interest projects" to "raise awareness of Veterans' needs and interests."⁴⁹

Table 1. FEDERAL AND COUNTY VETERANS SERVICES SPENDING

COUNTY	VETERAN POP.	2015	2016	2017	FY 16 COUNTY Per Capita Veteran Spending	FY 16 FEDERAL Veterans Affairs Total Spending per County **	FY 16 FEDERAL Veterans Affairs Veteran Spending Per Capita	PER CAPITA: Dollars spent/ Dollars generated
DUTCHESS	14,95	\$406,140.00	\$603,323.00	\$641,010.00	\$40.35	\$127,167	\$8.51	\$4.74
ULSTER	10,668	\$678,603.00	\$818,455.00	\$947,817.00	\$76.72	\$59,585	\$5.59	\$13.74
ORANGE	21,198	\$995,246.00	\$1,093,943.00	\$1,107,059.00	\$52.22	\$157,533	\$7.43	\$7.03
PUTNAM	4,404	\$362,835.00	\$471,227.00	\$275,710.00	\$107.01	\$28,861	\$6.55	\$16.33
SULLIVAN	4,461	\$598,174.00	\$634,632.00	\$714,699.00	\$142.27	\$32,954	\$7.39	\$19.26
ROCKLAND	9,176	\$515,515.00	\$527,190.00	\$538,795.00	\$57.46	\$62,911	\$6.86	\$8.38
WESTCHESTER	29,663					\$256,709	\$8.65	\$-
GREENE	3,702	\$231,337.00	\$260,844.00	\$329,180.00	\$70.46	\$24,828	\$6.71	\$10.51
COLUMBIA	4,106	\$161,647.00	\$204,694.00	\$151,945.00	\$49.85	\$21,780	\$5.30	\$9.40
ALBANY	16,543	\$230,387.00	\$297,897.00	\$301,800.00	\$18.01	\$125,060	\$7.56	\$2.38
WASHINGTON	5,045	\$165,213.00	\$192,265.00	\$187,802.00	\$38.11	\$26,588	\$5.27	\$7.23
NASSAU	48,869	\$436,335.00	\$472,747.00	\$502,254.00	\$9.67	\$268,999	\$5.50	\$1.76
SUFFOLK	68,418	\$542,843.00	\$738,274.00	\$640,491.00	\$10.79	\$516,661	\$7.55	\$1.43
ERIE	58,517	\$115,918.00	\$116,393.00	\$95,117.00	\$1.99	\$512,594	\$8.76	\$0.23
ONEIDA	17,081	\$354,662.00	\$385,065.00	\$378,516.00	\$22.54	\$107,941	\$6.32	\$3.57
ONONDAGA	29,441	\$510,698.00	\$644,191.00	\$674,005.00	\$21.88	\$244,107	\$8.29	\$2.64
MONROE	39,801	\$611,951.00	\$731,701.00	\$574,983.00	\$18.38	\$216,374	\$5.44	\$3.38
BROOME	13,495	\$439,468.00	\$424,155.00	\$518,500.00	\$31.43	\$61,349	\$4.55	\$6.91
ST.LAWRENCE	8,718	\$143,754.00	\$141,652.00	\$147,964.00	\$16.25	\$59,999	\$6.88	\$2.36
CHATAUQUA	10,305	\$277,612.00	\$231,821.00	\$232,950.00	\$22.50	\$80,187	\$7.78	\$2.89
ESSEX	3,365	\$79,201.00	\$78,123.00	\$81,013.00	\$23.22	\$17,433	\$5.18	\$4.48
HAMILTON	576	\$13,600.00	\$13,600.00	\$13,600.00	\$23.60	\$1,489	\$2.58	\$9.13
WAYNE	7,038	\$252,057.00	\$247,834.00	\$275,703.00	\$35.21	\$45,150	\$6.41	\$5.49
SCHENECTADY	9,489	\$135,887.00	\$148,036.00	\$168,762.00	\$15.60	\$55,799	\$5.88	\$2.65
DELAWARE	3,407	\$273,805.00	\$264,606.00	\$261,920.00	\$77.66	\$17,370	\$5.10	\$15.23
CATARAUGUS	6,811	\$226,884.00	\$236,132.00	\$230,722.00	\$34.67	\$52,692	\$7.74	\$4.48
CAYUGA	5,719	\$197,727.00	\$282,182.00	\$236,288.00	\$49.34	\$37,879	\$6.62	\$7.45
CHEMUNG	7,307	\$247,972.00	\$247,972.00	\$236,399.00	\$33.94	\$54,234	\$7.42	\$4.57
CLINTON	7,445	\$247,791.00	\$258,888.00	\$260,228.00	\$34.77	\$40,385	\$5.42	\$6.41
CORTLAND	3,043	\$416,791.00	\$423,047.00	\$429,387.00	\$139.00	\$22,341	\$7.34	\$18.94
FRANKLIN	3,654	\$146,284.00	\$116,448.00	\$164,448.00	\$31.86	\$22,145	\$6.06	\$5.26

COUNTY	VETERAN POP.	2015	2016	2017	FY 16 COUNTY Per Capita Veteran Spending	FY 16 FEDERAL Veterans Affairs Total Spending per County **	FY 16 FEDERAL Veterans Affairs Veteran Spending Per Capita	PER CAPITA: Dollars spent/ Dollars generated
FULTON	4,029	\$59,252.00	\$79,955.00	\$104,644.00	\$19.85	\$21,127	\$5.24	\$3.78
GENESEE	4,430	\$20,264.00	\$20,739.00	\$22,052.00	\$4.68	\$53,659	\$12.11	\$0.39
HERKIMER	5,264	\$137,743.00	\$137,999.00	\$122,068.00	\$26.22	\$25,008	\$4.75	\$5.52
JEFFERSON	14,805	\$158,201.00	\$182,605.00	\$188,150.00	\$12.33	\$124,394	\$8.40	\$1.47
LEWIS	2,331	\$8,559.00	\$8,559.00	\$8,559.00	\$3.67	\$16,323	\$7.00	\$0.52
LIVINGSTON	3,657	\$92,004.00	\$122,895.00	\$89,115.00	\$33.60	\$24,832	\$6.79	\$4.95
MADISON	5,087	\$254,242.00	\$273,135.00	\$324,811.00	\$53.69	\$32,121	\$6.31	\$8.50
MONTGOMERY	3,512	\$188,061.00	\$138,026.00	\$133,481.00	\$39.31	\$21,568	\$6.14	\$6.40
NIAGARA	15,527	\$12,793.00	\$7,500.00	\$7,500.00	\$0.48	\$123,042	\$7.92	\$0.06
ORLEANS	2,982	\$100,736.00	\$96,041.00	\$100,741.00	\$32.21	\$23,685	\$7.94	\$4.05
OSWEGO	9,530	\$138,838.00	\$134,394.00	\$154,579.00	\$14.10	\$73,394	\$7.70	\$1.83
OTSEGO	4,394	\$67,435.00	\$84,186.00	\$122,390.00	\$19.16	\$23,906	\$5.44	\$3.52
RENSSELAER	10,370	\$301,667.00	\$374,354.00	\$294,073.00	\$36.10	\$67,041	\$6.47	\$5.58
SARATOGA	18,140	\$325,058.00	\$317,611.00	\$316,256.00	\$17.51	\$81,079	\$4.47	\$3.92
SCHOHARIE	2,641	\$23,509.00	\$28,380.00	\$28,380.00	\$10.75	\$15,505	\$5.87	\$1.83
SCHUYLER	1,604	\$53,674.27	\$58,158.00	\$53,892.00	\$36.26	\$11,653	\$7.27	\$4.99
SENECA	2,664	\$161,807.00	\$133,307.00	\$174,014.00	\$50.05	\$17,644	\$6.62	\$7.56
STEUBEN	9,131	\$219,006.00	\$197,607.00	\$216,334.00	\$21.64	\$93,584	\$10.25	\$2.11
TIOGA	4,275	\$38,241.00	\$50,115.00	\$43,435.00	\$11.72	\$17,409	\$4.07	\$2.88
TOMPKINS	4,222	<i>NoVSOoffice</i>				\$23,016	\$5.45	\$-
WARREN	5,977	\$188,765.00	\$197,082.00	\$200,745.00	\$32.98	\$26,267	\$4.40	\$7.50
WYOMING	2,850	\$89,903.75	\$96,625.84	\$102,257.04	\$33.91	\$20,275	\$7.11	\$4.77
YATES	1,835	\$94,167.00	\$96,435.00	\$97,148.00	\$52.54	\$15,383	\$8.38	\$6.27
ALLEGANY	4,017	\$95,549.00	\$95,503.00	\$98,747.00	\$23.78	\$34,998	\$8.71	\$2.73
CHENANGO	4,060	<i>NoVSOoffice</i>				\$23,677	\$5.83	\$-
ONTARIO	8,000	\$306,685.00	\$338,090.00	\$357,521.00	\$42.26	\$75,085	\$9.39	\$4.50
TOTALS/AVG.	631,747	\$13,152,497.02	\$14,576,638.84	\$14,679,959.04	\$35.84	\$4,444,778	\$6.71	\$5.33

* Includes Budget Account Code 6511: Putnam Housing

* Per capita spending includes the following categories: Compensation & Pension, Education & Vocational Rehabilitation/Employment, Insurance and Indemnities, and Medical Care

** Sourced from: <https://www.va.gov/vetdata/Expenditures.asp>



As the military services become more demographically diverse, and new generations of Veterans are in need of assistance, achieving similar racial, ethnic, gender and generational diversity in small county Veterans' service offices, often staffed by Veterans of the Vietnam era, remains challenging.



As noted, there has been increased state Veteran-oriented programming outside the DVA, but this mental health, crisis intervention and criminal justice system diversion funding money rarely flows through county VSA's.⁵⁰ In some counties the PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran's Peer Support Program was included in the county Veteran agency budget, elevating its size and reliance on state aid.⁵¹ But this was uncommon; these funds were usually placed under the control of the County Mental Health agency.

As the military services become more demographically diverse, and new generations of Veterans are in need of assistance, achieving similar racial, ethnic, gender and generational diversity in small county Veterans' service offices, often staffed by Veterans of the Vietnam era, remains challenging. Some greater diversity is evident in larger local agencies, for example in Orange and Suffolk Counties.

Intergovernmental Relations

State with Federal Agencies: The mission of the State Division of Veteran's Affairs requires regular, intensive interaction and collaboration with the Federal Veteran's Administration and the Department for Defense. Access to VA and DOD electronic data-bases is essential to the agency achieving its mission. Evidence that this has been less than fully effective is a bill introduced in 2014 by U.S. Senator Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania to require the Secretary of Defense to share "certain information with State Veterans' agencies to facilitate the transition of members of the Armed Forces from military service to civilian life."⁵² In 2017 Hudson Valley Congressman Sean Maloney introduced the "Know Your Vets Act," which would require the Department of Defense to provide each out processing service member the option of sending his or her Discharge from Active Duty form (DD214) to the Veteran's service office of their County of origin.⁵³ Still, as of this writing DVA leadership confirms that, despite its persistent efforts over several years, the agency still lacks access to DOD databases of individuals separating from the military, hampering its ability to make first contact with them.⁵⁴

In 2016, the Division reported a total of 28,246 claims submitted on behalf of Veterans and their families, a tripling of the totals for each of the three previous years. (*See Table 2*) Agency leaders could not offer a full explanation of this "spike" in claims workload. However, they do attribute it, in part, to the VA decision to presumptively qualify Veterans for medical service who had been exposed to "dirty water" at Camp LeJeune.⁵⁵

Reversing the general pattern in most other areas of policy—state government dependence on federal aid—the New York Veterans' agency has provided considerable help to the federal Veterans Administration (VA) offices in the state in expediting services to New Yorkers. Following Governor Andrew Cuomo's 2014 summit on responding comprehensively to needs of Veterans and military families, a year-long state organized "Strike Force" effort, modeled on an approach taken in Texas,

Table 2. NYS DIVISION OF VETERANS AFFAIRS DATA REPORTED 2013–2016

	2013	2014	2015	2016
Division Offices	72	68	68	68
VA-Accredited Veterans' Benefits Counselors	51	45	56	63
Compensation & Pension Claims Filed for Veterans & their Families	10,603	9,815	9,551	28,246
Money Awarded in Claims Filed by Division Counselors	\$165,736,295.00	\$89,124,763	\$74,217,710	\$104,972,893
State Blind Annuity Recipients (Veterans)	2,501	2,380	2,256	2,184
State Blind Annuity Recipients (Surviving Spouses)	\$1,823	1,820	1,838	1,810
Total Blind Annuity Payments	\$5,804,509	\$4,279,072	\$5,603,001	\$5,457,724
Total Gold Star Parent Annuity Payments	\$33,750	\$41,250	\$72,500	\$82,750
Residents Using G.I. Bill Education Benefits	23,000	35,000	35,000	25,000
G.I. Bill Approved Educational Programs in New York	1,150	1,100	1,200	1,200
Money that G.I. Bill-Approved Programs Brought Into New York	NA	NA	\$500,000,000	\$5,000,000,000
Veterans & Family Members Residing in State Veterans Nursing Homes	1,081	1,073	1,010	663
Total Beds in State Veterans' Nursing Homes	1,220	NA	NA	NA
Percentage of Beds Filled in State Veterans Nursing Homes	96%	95.70%	95%	94%
Number of Claims Filed by Counselors at State Veterans Nursing Homes	288	524	166	447
Businesses Certified as Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Businesses	NA	21	150	284
Veterans Currently Listed in the State's Veterans Temporary Hiring Portal	NA	NA	560	1,461
Veterans Currently Listed in the State's "55-c Program" Hiring Portal	NA	NA	268	271
New State Employees Hired Under Veterans with Disabilities Employment Program	15	NA	NA	NA
Total State Employees Currently Classified as Working under Veterans with Disabilities Employment Program	100	NA	NA	NA
Drivers' Licenses with Distinguishing Veteran's Mark Issued	6,177	25,022	18,662	NA
Total Number of Licenses with Distinguishing Veteran's Mark Issued	NA	NA	43,949	NA
Veterans with Disabilities Issued State Parks Lifetime Liberty Passes	NA	NA	2,510	2,445
Total Number of Veterans Issued Lifetime Liberty Passes	NA	NA	4,358	7,000
NYS School Districts Offering Veterans School Tax Exemption	NA	NA	228	41%
Recipients of New York State's Veterans Real Property Tax Exemptions	NA	NA	488,143	554,052

was launched in collaboration with the Veteran's Administration to reduce the extensive backlogs of long pending claims for VA benefits at regional offices in Buffalo and New York City. Serious backlogs persist, however, especially in processing appeals from VA decisions denying benefits.

State with Other State Agencies: At the state level, the Division reports working with a great array of agencies, including the Department of Labor, the Office of Mental Health, the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services, the State Education Department, the Higher Education Services Corporation, the Office for the Aging, the Department of Health, the Department of Motor Vehicles, the Department of State, the Department of Housing and Community Renewal, the Department of Economic Development, the State University of New York, and the Division of Military and Naval Affairs.⁵⁶ State agencies maintain Veteran's liaisons. The DVA hosts a quarterly conference call to provide updates on legislative and regulatory, and policy developments.

One successful initiative resulted in the Department of Motor Vehicles agreeing to provide a Veteran's designation on drivers' licenses for those honorably discharged, a valuable accessible resource for proving Veterans status when required. The Division collaborates with law schools to make available pro bono legal services to veterans; five \$50,000 Justice for Hero's grants are awarded annually in support of this effort. Additionally it works with the court system, law schools, and not-for-profits in the development and implementation of "Veterans' Courts," an alternative to incarceration program for qualifying Veterans.⁵⁷

On some occasions failures of coordination with the DVA are the responsibility of potential partner agencies. According to one estimate, there were 93,000 veterans covered by Medicaid in New York State in 2015.⁵⁸ Two years earlier, a state study showed that Medicaid services valued at \$3.47 billion were delivered to 70,000 Veterans

“
If coordination of benefits were properly pursued, the comptroller said, “...the Medicaid savings to State and local taxpayers could be several millions of dollars annually...”⁶⁰

”

in the state. These Veterans were also eligible for healthcare through the VA system. Federal studies have shown that many Veterans are unaware of their VA health benefits, and therefore do not claim them.⁵⁹ In New York State, the local social service agencies assisting persons seeking Medicaid must refer them to the DVA or local Veterans' agencies to assure coordination of benefits. This process is overseen by the State Department of Health. An audit by the state comptroller found that “The [State Health] Department did not effectively oversee localities' efforts to coordinate Veterans' Medicaid and VA health benefits, nor did it require the use of “the federal Public Assistance Reporting Information System (PARIS) to identify Veterans' spouses and dependents eligible for VA health care benefits,” or “develop a method to inform Veterans applying for Medicaid through the new New York Health Benefit Exchange [set up under the federal Affordable Care Act] of their VA benefits.” If coordination of benefits were properly pursued, the comptroller said, “...the Medicaid savings to State and local taxpayers could be several millions of dollars annually...”⁶⁰

State with Counties: At a public hearing in 2013, Deputy Director Morea of the Yonkers VA Office told two state Assembly Committees that his office did not use the Division's electronic database (Vet COP) because use was conditioned on providing the state with 51% of new claims. “I'm not going to do that,” Morea said. “I don't want it mandated from the State that I have to provide them with

a certain percentage. I work with very many different service organizations as a municipal employee, and when I can't handle a claim because I don't have the power of attorney, I have a good enough relationship with the other service organizations that do make that contact."⁶¹

The state agency's requirements, it said, were based upon its provision of extensive training to local VSA's in the use of the State database to prepare and file claims and of "quality control services for all claims and appeals provided by NYS employees at NYS DVA's Intake Centers. Since substantial NYS resources are devoted to a local VSA that receives accreditation from NYS DVA, uses NYS DVA's electronic database, and files claims under NYS DVA's Power of Attorney," an agency official remarked, "it did not seem unreasonable for NYS to require the local VSA to file a majority of their claims with the State."⁶²

Nonetheless, this state requirement was removed in 2013.

Additionally in that year, the Division announced partnerships with Saratoga, Chautauqua and Monroe Counties, and New York City for training local employees so that they could become Veterans' Service Officers under the Division's Power of Attorney. This, the Division said, would give them "access to essential data from the VA," allow them to "benefit from quality control" at the state level, and "enable them to take advantage of training opportunities offered at the state level."⁶³ The Essex County VSO, no longer staffed, became a state partner agency in 2014. In a following step, in 2015 the Division gave the Saratoga County Veteran's agency access to the Defense Personnel Records Information Retrieval System on a pilot basis.⁶⁴ The state division reports that "about half" of county agencies now have a collaborative relationship with it. In 2016 the Erie County agency was not yet filing claims electronically, nor was it in direct communication with the VA about claims. Reliance upon Veterans for keeping and conveying paper records led to inaccuracies and further delayed decisions on accessing benefits.⁶⁵

Most importantly, in 2013, the state legislature passed a law requiring that every director of a New York local government Veteran's Service Office be accredited by the Veteran's Administration. Existing employees had three years to meet this requirement. New appointees had to accomplish accreditation within eighteen months of their appointment. Thereafter, accreditation had to be kept current.⁶⁶

VA accreditation required a formal application, a background check, training and an examination to assure that qualified, responsible informed persons were counseling Veterans and helping them apply for and obtain available benefits. Only "recognized organizations and individuals, whether congressionally chartered VSOs or VA accredited claims agents or attorneys, can legally represent a Veteran, service member, dependent, or survivor before VA."⁶⁷

The 2013 law further provided that necessary training to meet its requirements was to be provided by the State Division at no cost to localities. In urging the governor to sign it, the agency General Counsel wrote:

Local representation is a key piece in serving all of New York State's Veterans and their families. NYS DVA cannot meet the logistical needs in all locations throughout New York State on a full-time basis. Accordingly, New York State makes money available for Veteran Service Agencies through the NYS DVA aid to localities budget to ensure local representation is available. Accrediting these organizations will bridge the service gap and allow New York State Veterans and their families better access to accredited counselors...⁶⁸

The intrinsic merits of this measure were compelling; citing the minimal state financial support given to sustain county Veteran's agencies as a further rationale for its signing, however, was problematic.

Chart 1. DUTCHESS COUNTY METRICS REPORTED BY DIVISION OF VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE ANNUALLY (FY 2017 DATA)

Division of Veterans Services—Provide outreach and education to veterans and families regarding services and entitlements available from federal, state and local governments

WORKLOAD MEASURE	2015 ACTUAL	2016 ESTIMATE	2017 PLAN	CHANGE	% CHANGE
Education and Vocational Rehab	408	428	428	-	0%
Pension	1,133	1,189	1,189	-	0%
Burial/Insurance	1,064	1,117	1,117	-	0%
Compensation	1,821	1,913	1,913	-	0%
Discharge Papers, Military Records	1,221	1,283	1,283	-	0%
Blind Annuity	88	92	92	-	0%
Loan	324	340	340	-	0%
Medical Assistance	1,355	1,423	1,423	-	0%
TOTAL NUMBER OF CONTACTS	15,199	15,958	15,958	-	0%

Most recently, the Division of Veterans’ Affairs annual report made no mention of interaction with county Veteran’s offices.⁶⁹ Interviews conducted with Veteran Service Officers from Ulster, Orange, and Putnam Counties suggested that, notwithstanding the state’s statutorily-based oversight role, the state/county relationship was minimal. (One preferred it this way!) Ulster and Orange County officials reported no relationship and even described negative interactions. The Putnam county director complained of state failure to provide statutorily required training for national certification, effectively imposing a cost on the counties.

Some intergovernmental tensions are based upon misperceptions, or communication failure. An example: the DVA delivers through its own field staff the “Fresh Connect” program, undertaken collaboratively with the Agriculture Department, to distribute food checks to Veterans, useable at farmers’ markets. This administrative approach is required, agency officials say, for this state program. Nonetheless, one county director in the Hudson Valley who maintains an active food pantry program for veterans was highly critical of being bypassed by this effort.

When mustering out, a Veteran may have a copy of his or her discharge document sent to a state Veteran’s office. Notwithstanding reported initiatives to provide partner agency access to federal data bases, County offices report difficulty in getting address records of returning Veterans in order to support their own outreach efforts.

Performance Metrics

The New York DVA routinely reports annual summary descriptive statistics on Veterans and the agency’s interaction with them: total numbers, demographic characteristics, eras of service, number assisted, character of assistance provided, and the total value of benefits provided to those assisted. However, no year to year comparisons or time series data are provided to document trends. Review of county budgets shows that, in jurisdictions where metrics are in general use, they have been developed and are applied to county Veterans’ agencies. Dutchess County, for example, reports in its budget on contacts made by its Veteran’s agency in various service areas, with projected changes in workload (goals) anticipated for the budget year. These, however, provide no information on outcomes, efficiency or effectiveness. (See Chart 1)

Performance Strategies 2015

Goal 1: OUTCOMES - Optimize deliverables for veterans

OBJECTIVE 1: Ensure customers' needs are met in a timely manner

Division of Veterans Benefits Strategies



Action Plan Start Date: 1/1/2015	Measurement Frequency: Quarterly	Division: Veterans Benefits
---	---	------------------------------------

Performance Strategy Goal: 85% of all benefit program applications will be processed ≤ 30 days from the date received.

Metric (how success will be measured): Each Program Area will be carefully monitored for proficiency through reporting on a weekly basis. Emphasis will be on applications submitted within the 21 day window for processing. Applications will have to be reviewed by the second week of being submitted and have an eligibility determination within three weeks of submission.

Value (to agency or customer): The customer will be confident in knowing that their application will be reviewed, evaluated and subsequently receive an eligibility determination within 30 days of submission. The WDVA will benefit from having measurable standards in place to evaluate the proficiency of current staff, make informed personnel decisions based on metrics of performance and will be able to provide to the customer predictable timelines and expectations.

Target End Date: 12/31/2015

Current Status: On Target

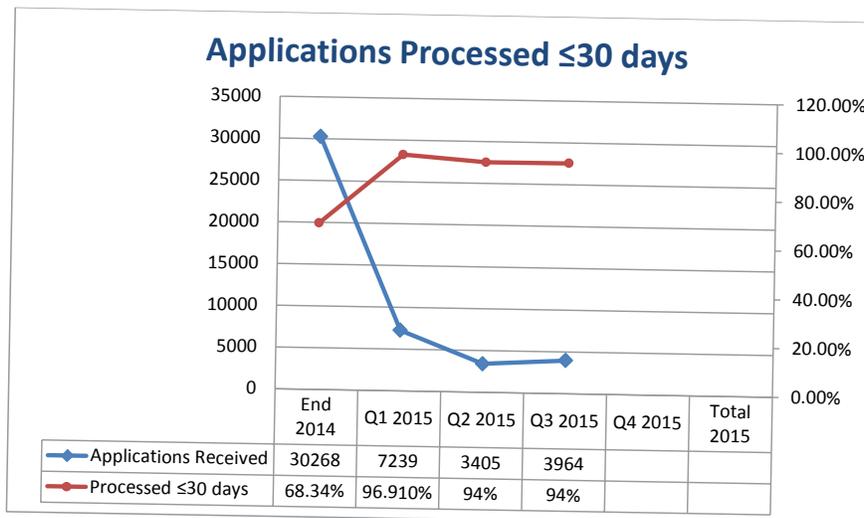


Chart 3. ALABAMA COUNTY DATA REPORTED BY STATE VETERANS SERVICE AGENCY ANNUALLY

Actions and Services Rendered by ADVA County Offices During FY 2016

COUNTY	LETTERS SENT/ RECEIVED	CONTACTS IN PERSON/ PHONE/FAX/ EMAIL	COMP & PENSION CLAIMS FILED	MEDICAL CLAIMS FILED	INSURANCE CLAIMS FILED	EDUCATION CLAIMS FILED	MISC ACTIONS/ HOME-OWNERS BENEFITS
RANDOLPH	1,624	1,500	116	16	0	4	1,088
RUSSELL	1,256	892	208	28	8	4	1,100
SHELBY	424	8,608	964	112	0	52	3,688
ST. CLAIR	736	1,916	872	100	0	56	2,284
SUMTER	<i>Closed</i>						
TALLADEGA	80	364	52	8	0	4	456
TALLAPOOSA	1,192	2,628	100	32	8	16	408
TUSCALOOSA	644	4,156	384	12	0	108	3,852
WALKER	396	4,520	320	20	16	40	3,268
WASHINGTON	<i>Closed</i>						
WILCOX	<i>Closed</i>						
WINSTON	<i>Closed</i>						
TOTAL	77,904	167,556	19,172	2,560	208	1,904	116,300

Sample p. 32 of 2016 Annual Report

There are no specified standard operating procedures, performance standards or metrics specified by the state Veteran’s agency that would allow the comparative assessment of its efficiency and effectiveness over time, within a single year, or compared to those of other states. And though the state agency has legal responsibility to oversee county offices, there are no uniform procedures, standards or metrics in use to determine their relative efficiency and effectiveness, year-by-year or over time.

There are available models of the use of such metrics in other states. For example, the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs adopted a compelling strategic plan in 2015/16. It specifies the agency’s mission, vision and values and identifies specific policy focal points, called “issues of emphasis.”⁷⁰ The agency’s activities with regard to these are then organized around four broad goals, with measurable objectives, and strategies and action plans to achieve these. Though it does not address cost

effectiveness (outcomes relative to units of input) the Wisconsin report contains performance targets and measures for specified goals and objectives, addressing “what, for whom, how much and by when.” Measures are reported in a visually interesting manner and delivered on one page. So, for example, “Optimizing deliverables for Veterans” is measured in part by the percentage of applications for eligibility for services evaluated and determined within 30 days, with a target of 85%. Another example: “Raising public knowledge of Veteran’s issues” is measured in part by increase in the number of women Veterans on the agency mailing list, with a targeted increase of 5% per year. (See Chart 2)

The Alabama Veteran’s agency report is similar to that of Dutchess County New York, in that it is oriented to measuring workload, not outcomes or cost effectiveness: it provides information on contacts by various means and claims filed for different categories of benefits. However,



It makes little sense for both counties and state government to operate field offices across the state to serve Veterans.



the report is exemplary for its systematic comparative presentation of county level data. (*See Chart 3*)

We Can Do Better

Delivering Veterans' services in New York State is a complex inter-organizational enterprise with dozens of institutional participants, governmental and non-governmental. With the accelerating loss of the WWII and Korean War generations, the number of New York's military Veterans and their proportion of our state's population is projected to continue to decline. Our more recent Veterans are different than those that came before in their demographic diversity and the varied character and consequences of their military experiences. Yet the needs of our new Veterans for support as they transition to civilian life and seek the benefits they have earned is as compelling as in the past, as is the worthiness of the claim upon us of this all-volunteer cohort, a group that chose to enter service during an era of almost continuous warfare.

Certainly, persons delivering Veterans services in state and local government passionately continue to believe that those returning from military service have earned the best support we can offer. Elected public leaders profess to share this view. But the manner in which we are organized, or unorganized, mitigates against optimum performance in meeting this goal. New York can do better.

It makes little sense for both counties and state government to operate field offices across the state to serve Veterans. There appear to be no standard procedures, practices or benchmarks. Efforts are

sometimes coordinated, sometimes not. The Division of Veterans Affairs blames the Defense Department for depriving it of needed information to contact Veterans and serve them. County offices blame the DVA. Every government has its own list of Veterans, and each seeks to augment it through use of available data—e.g., Veterans seeking property tax exemptions—and outreach. Yet lists are incomplete and many Veterans remain unreached and unserved.

Access to needed technology, information and data bases is not uniformly available across the state. State resources devoted to Veteran-oriented programs have risen, but those used to advise Veterans at various stages in the transition from military to civilian life and in accessing available services as needs arise have declined significantly. Meanwhile local offices may not be staffed by credentialed personnel; many operate on minimal resources within established routines and relationships.

Veterans' services should be delivered fully through counties, as are most other social services in New York State. County government is rooted in our communities; it is locally connected. The state government's role should be to: lead in collaboratively establishing standard procedures and goals; aggressively acquire and provide the information needed for effective outreach and service provision; maintain centralized data bases and applications to support county offices; acquire and distribute uniform technology; provide regular training; and be a source of advice on best practices and programming gathered from a review of the work of state and local Veterans' service offices across the nation. Additionally, the state might maintain a highly trained team that can be deployed to collaborate in solving particular local Veteran's service delivery, or address issues like coordination of Medicaid and VA benefits.

And, most importantly, the NYS DVA would oversee and assess the performance of county agencies. County offices would remain able to act autonomously in discretionary areas, in accord with local priorities, but



Veterans' services should be delivered fully through counties, as are most other social services in New York State. County government is rooted in our communities; it is locally connected.



would no longer operate semi-autonomously in agreed core areas, for example filing claims and pursuing appeals. They would enjoy additional state aid to cover the cost of needed additional personnel, either transferred as a result of reorganization or newly hired. But, concomitantly, they would have to produce results in accord with uniform, collaboratively-established standard metrics designed to assess outcomes for Veterans relative to resources expended. Goals would be established, regular reporting would be required, and results published on state and local websites.

With such a system in place—a system, not a collection of partly connected pieces—it is much more likely that Ulster County's Bill Jones and all our Hudson Valley Veterans will be well-advised when they come home. He won't have to find us; we will be prepared in advance, and find him and serve him in a timely and effective fashion. When Bill signed on he swore to "...defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic..." He did his duty for us. We must do all we can to redeem Abraham Lincoln's century and a half old reciprocal pledge to "...care for him who shall have borne the battle..."

AUTHORS

Gerald Benjamin is Distinguished Professor of Political Science and Director of the Benjamin Center at SUNY New Paltz. Alone and with others, he has written or edited numerous books and articles and commented extensively on state, regional and local government and policy, with a special emphasis on New York. He is a Vietnam-era U.S. Army Veteran.

Timothy Toomey graduated in 2017 with a major of Political Science. An Afghanistan Campaign Veteran, Timothy served as an Infantryman in the New York Army National Guard's 69th Infantry Regiment. Prior to working in the Benjamin Center, Timothy worked for the Office of Veteran and Military services assisting incoming veteran students and managing the student Veteran peer to peer mentoring group. While working at The Benjamin Center, Tim assisted on several projects studying New York State government. Upon graduating, Timothy plans to attend law school.

NOTES

- ¹ *Population Representation in the Military Services: Fiscal Year 2014 Summary Report* | <https://www.cna.org/pop-rep/2014/summary/summary.pdf> p.23.
- ² “Distance from Ellenville, NY, USA to Baghdad, Iraq.” USA Geo. Accessed August 02, 2016. <http://www.usageo.org/pwp/3623965-2864236>.
- ³ “PTSD: National Center for PTSD.” *Mental Health Effects of Serving in Afghanistan and Iraq*. Accessed August 01, 2016. <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/PTSD-overview/reintegration/overview-mental-health-effects.asp>.
- ⁴ “PTSD: National Center for PTSD.” PTSD: National Center for PTSD. Accessed August 01, 2016. <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/PTSD-overview/basics/what-is-ptsd.asp>.
- ⁵ Annual Report 2016, p. 4.
- ⁶ http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/lincoln2.asp
- ⁷ He would join 12,366 Veterans in Ulster County, 16,945 from Dutchess County, 21,688 from Orange County, and 4,452 from Putnam County. Amongst 17-44 year old males and females, Bill would join 1,782 Veterans in Ulster County, 2,248 from Dutchess County, 4,792 from Orange County, and 563 from Putnam County.
- ⁸ See Colleen M. Heflin, Leslie B. Hodges and Andrew S. London. *TAPed Out: A Study of the Department of Defense’s Transition Assistance Program* in Hicks, Louis, Eugenia L. Weiss, Jose E. Coll, and Robert A. McDonald (eds.). *The Civilian Lives of U.S. Veterans: Issues and Identities*. Vol. 1. 2 vols. (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, an imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2017) pp. 61-90.
- ⁹ *Transitioning Veterans: DOD Needs to Improve Performance Reporting and Monitoring for the Transition Assistance Program* <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-18-23> | GAO-18-23: Published: Nov 8, 2017.
- ¹⁰ Heflin et. al. (2016) pp. 63-68.
- ¹¹ <http://www.yellowribbon.mil/yrrp/faq.html> visited December 22, 2016.
- ¹² Andrea N. Goldstein. *How to help the Local Reps the V.A Depends On* (Sept. 22, 2016). http://taskandpurpose.com/help-local-reps-va-depends/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=tp-today
- ¹³ See: *Veterans Benefits: GAO’s Proposed Role in Reviewing Efforts to Protect Veterans from Financial Exploitation* | GAO-17-804T: Published: Sep 13, 2017.
- ¹⁴ See <https://www.va.gov/ogc/accreditation.asp>
- ¹⁵ <https://www.va.gov/vso/>
- ¹⁶ For a description of state level Veteran’s benefits by state see: <http://www.military.com/benefits/Veteran-state-benefits/state-Veterans-benefits-directory.html>
- ¹⁷ This is the list derived from the NYS Division of Veteran’s Affairs phone application: Assistance with VA disability claims, NYS Veterans Tuition Allowance (scholarship), Military Service Recognition Scholarships, Operation Recognition (G.E.D. to WW2, Korea, and Nam vets who left H.S. early), Regents awards for children of deceased and disabled vets., Veterans Speaker Program (Vets to classrooms to discuss their experiences), NYS Peddlers License , Veterans with disabilities employment program (55-c), Military Service claim for Unemployment, New York State Dept. of Labor Employment services , Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program, Renewal of Temporary Teaching Certificates, Hire-A-Vet Credit, NYS Civil Service credits, NYS Supplemental Burial Allowance , NYS Blind Annuity Program , NYS Income Tax Exemption for Military Pay, NYS Motor Vehicle Registration Fee Exemption, Custom NYS License Plates for Military and Veterans, NYS Retirement Credit Free Sporting licenses, EZ Pass for Disabled Vets, Lifetime Liberty Pass for NYS Vets with Disabilities (Free access to NYS Parks), Fresh Connect Checks , Service Disabled Veteran- Owned business Act , Incarcerated Veterans Program, Women Veterans’ Services, Gold Star Annuity Program, NYS Veterans Nursing Homes, PTSD—NYS Veterans Help line (Not a crisis line, connects with a Benefits advisor), NYS retail discount Veterans card (administered through the counties), NYS Real Property Tax deadline extension (Up to localities), Property tax exemptions, Homes for Veterans (through SONYMA).
- ¹⁸ Executive Law. §353.
- ¹⁹ Laws of 1994. Chapter 271; Laws of 1999, Chapter 358. Introduced in May, 2017, The Deborah Sampson Act, named for Revolutionary War hero Deborah Sampson, requires the VA to carry out a 3 year pilot program assessing the feasibility of a permanent program for recently discharged female Veterans. The program would emphasize treatment of service related sexual trauma and female Veteran homelessness. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2452>
- ²⁰ NYS Comptroller. Division of Management Audit and State Financial Services. Division of Veterans Affairs. *Administration and Coordination of Veterans Services*. Report 980 S - 56 <http://osc.state.ny.us/audits/allaudits/093000/98s56.pdf> . New York State Comptroller. Division of Management Audit and State Financial Services. Division of Veterans Affairs. Administration and Coordination of Veterans Services. Report 2001-F-12. <http://osc.state.ny.us/audits/allaudits/093001/01f12.pdf> . But see discussion of difficulty with required internal controls certification. <http://osc.state.ny.us/audits/allaudits/093009/08s115.pdf>
- ²¹ Executive Law § 353. 11
- ²² New York State Comptroller. *State Support for New York’s Veterans*, November 2015. http://www.osc.state.ny.us/reports/other/Veterans_11_2015.pdf . In addition to services provided through the Division, the Comptroller summarized “Health-related services are available to eligible Veterans through five State-operated Veterans’ nursing homes, and the Medicaid program. Other programs and initiatives provide benefits associated with higher education costs, housing and property taxes, doing business with the State, civil service employment, small business loans, and support services such as counseling and peer-to-peer programs.’ Additionally, “New York State spent approximately \$200 million in State-share payments for more than 31,000 Veterans who were enrolled in the New York Medicaid program in SFY2014-15.”
- ²³ Comments on an earlier draft of this essay from Benjamin Pomarance and Shannon MacColl (NYS DVA), received on December 15 2017. (files of the Benjamin Center)
- ²⁴ “New York State Division of Veterans’ Affairs.” *About the New York State Division of Veterans’ Affairs*. Accessed August 02, 2016. <https://Veterans.ny.gov/content/about-new-york-state-division-Veterans-affairs>.
- ²⁵ Testimony of Paul Stote, public hearing (2012) p. 101.
- ²⁶ Testimony of Andrew Davis. Director, Saratoga County Veteran’s Agency, Public hearing (2012) p. 63.
- ²⁷ Telephone Interview with Benjamin Pomarance, Deputy Director, VA Programs November 21, 2017
- ²⁸ Annual Report (2015) p. 20.
- ²⁹ *NYS Division of Veterans Affairs Directory*, 2016.
- ³⁰ <https://Veterans.ny.gov/> Last visited December 22, 2016. See also footnote 7, above.
- ³¹ Annual Report (2016) p. 11.
- ³² <https://www.nacvso.org/membership/benefits> Last visited on December 27, 2016. See also Bev Schlotterbeck. “A Closer Look at the Role of the County Veterans Service Officer *County News* Nov. 2, 2015

NOTES continued

- ³³ For the social context of the development of a national movement in support of Veterans see Drew Gilpin Faust. *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*. New York: Knopf, 2008.
- ³⁴ NY Laws of 1887. Chapter 706.
- ³⁵ *County Veterans Service Officer Association of The State of New York, Inc. Directory*. p. 2. 2017
- ³⁶ NY County Law. Article 22 § 800. .
- ³⁷ §357.1
- ³⁸ *County Veterans Service Officer Association of The State of New York, Inc. Directory*. P. 14. 2017. The 4 cities are Glen Cove, Mt. Vernon, New York City, and Yonkers.
- ³⁹ §357.3.b.
- ⁴⁰ <https://www.va.gov/vso/VSO-Directory.pdf>
- ⁴¹ Executive §368.1-2.
- ⁴² Assembly Hearing (2012) p. 47.
- ⁴³ Stefan I, Mychajliw, Erie County Comptroller. Performance Audit of the Erie County Veteran's Service Agency for the Year Ending December 21, 2015 (August, 2016)
- ⁴⁴ Interview with Benjamin Pomerance (2017)
- ⁴⁵ NYS Comptroller. *Homeless Veterans in New York State: Local Partnerships Making Real Progress* (November, 2017) p. 11.
- ⁴⁶ NYS Comptroller (Nov., 2017) p. 10.
- ⁴⁷ Excludes Westchester County, Chenango County, and Tompkins County. In Westchester County, Veteran's services are provided through the Department of Social Services. Funds do not appear to be separately budgeted. Tompkins and Chenango don't have a county Veterans service agency
- ⁴⁸ Broome County Executive Budget. 2017. P. 360
- ⁴⁹ See <https://www.budget.ny.gov/budgetFP/FY2017.FP.pdf> p. 136.
- ⁵⁰ Peer-to-peer programs are reputed to have greater success in reaching recent returned Veterans than do more conventional programming. Opinions varied among interviewees regarding the effectiveness of the Dwyer program. We did not find a formal evaluation of it.
- ⁵¹ S.2801 (2014)
- ⁵² Office of Sean Maloney. Press Release. "Maloney Introduces Know Your Vets Act to Help Veterans Safely Transition Back to Civilian Life" (Nov 17, 2017) <https://seanmaloney.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/maloney-introduces-know-your-vets-act-to-help-Veterans-safely-transition>
- ⁵³ Interview with Benjamin Pomerance (2017).
- ⁵⁴ <https://www.benefits.va.gov/COMPENSATION/claims-postservice-exposures-camp-lejeune-water.asp>
- ⁵⁵ New York State Assembly. Assembly Standing Committee on Veterans' Affairs and Assembly Standing Committee on Oversight, Analysis And Investigation. Public Hearing To Review The Operations Of County And City Veterans' Service Agencies That Are Overseen By The New York State Division Of Veterans' Affairs Albany, New York December 5th, 2012 .
- ⁵⁶ In the region, in 2015 the DVA established a collaboration with the Veterans and Military Families Advocacy Project on the Hudson Valley.
- ⁵⁷ http://familiesusa.org/sites/default/files/product_documents/Medicaid-Veterans_Factsheet_final.pdf
- ⁵⁸ See: https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/Profile_of_Unique_Veteran_Users.pdf
- ⁵⁹ New York State. Office of the State Comptroller. Division of State Government Accountability. Oversight of Localities' Efforts to Coordinate Veterans' Health Care Benefits Under Medicaid and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Report 2012-S-162 March 2014.
- ⁶⁰ Public hearing (2012) p. 92.
- ⁶¹ Comment of Benjamin Pomerance on an earlier draft of this report, December 15, 2017. Files of the Benjamin Center.
- ⁶² Annual Report 2013, pages not numbered.
- ⁶³ Annual Report (2015) p. 20
- ⁶⁴ Count Comptroller Audit (2016) p. 8.
- ⁶⁵ A 6221-C, S5825 (2013). Executive Law §357.3
- ⁶⁶ <https://www.benefits.va.gov/vso/>
- ⁶⁷ Samuel Spitzberg, General Counsel DVA to Mylan Denerstein, Counsel to the Governor, July 24, 2013 NYS Bill and Veto Jackets: 213, Chapter 198 New York State Archives
- ⁶⁸ <http://dva.state.wi.us/Documents/newsMediaDocuments/StrategicPlan15-16.pdf>

Editorial staff
Christine Wilkins
Janis Benincasa



910350-99

The Benjamin Center for Public Policy Initiatives
State University of New York at New Paltz
1 Hawk Drive
New Paltz, NY 12561-2443

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage
P A I D
Permit #6127
Newburgh, New York

THE BENJAMIN CENTER for Public Policy Initiatives

Independently and in collaboration with local governments, businesses, and not-for-profits in the Hudson Valley, The Benjamin Center (formerly CRREO):

- **conducts studies on topics of regional and statewide importance;**
- **brings visibility and focus to these matters;**
- **fosters communities working together to better serve our citizenry;**
- **and advances the public interest in our region.**

The Benjamin Center connects our region with the expertise of SUNY New Paltz faculty. We assist in all aspects of applied research, evaluation, and policy analysis. We provide agencies and businesses with the opportunity to obtain competitive grants, achieve efficiencies and identify implementable areas for success.

www.newpaltz.edu/benjamincenter