

VETERANS CONNECTIONS

News from the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs ★ Volume 3, Issue 2 ★ May 2023



★ Message from IDVA Director Terry Prince

May has been an exciting month dedicated to National Military Appreciation Month that includes Military Spouse Appreciation Day on May 12, Armed Forces Day on May 20, and Memorial Day on May 29. We also celebrate Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage, Jewish American Heritage, and Mental Health Awareness Months. An entire week was set aside to recognize IDVA's nurses during National Nurse's Week and our skilled nursing homes during Skilled Nursing Care Week. Our nurses are amazing professionals who deliver care with such compassion and grace in our homes that offer beautiful communities for our Veterans.

As we approach Memorial Day, we recognize that it is one the most difficult days of the year for our service-members, Veterans, families, and survivors. While some will celebrate the holiday with picnics and vacations, many of us will be remembering those we lost — our shipmates, battle buddies, wingmen, and Marines who died for our country.

Out of the many famous and impactful quotes I have heard over the years, one stands out in particular: "Ceremonies are important. But our gratitude must be more than visits to the troops, and once-a-year Memorial Day ceremonies. We honor the dead best by treating the living well." — Jennifer Mulhern Granholm, former Governor of Michigan.

Those simple and impactful words serve as an "ah ha" moment to channel our energy into thoughtfulness, generosity, and kindness — throughout the year. We honor our nation's heroes by creating positive experiences, harmonious communities, and a country that respects the freedoms they gave their lives protecting.

Being a Veteran is a unique experience, one that less than one percent of our population will ever know. I'm asking everyone to remember the community's role in the lives of our Veterans, their families, and survivors. Join us on Memorial Day (and every day) in tribute of those who served. The smallest gesture — planting a tree, volunteering, or checking in on a Veteran who is alone, can make a tremendous difference. Simple gestures have enormous impact, and if we all share in this effort, we will continue to nurture a world that truly honors those who have given their lives.

As always, thank you for staying connected to IDVA.

Sincerely, **Terry Prince**, IDVA Director

Want to help shape the future of IDVA? We want to hear from you.

IDVA and researchers from the University of Illinois Chicago are seeking Veterans and their family members who would be willing to share their experiences interacting with IDVA's services during 1-hour, one-on-one interviews. These interviews would be conducted over video or phone call. As a "thank you," interview participants will receive a \$50 gift card.

If you're interested in participating in an interview, please click the link below to fill out the intake survey. Your information will not be shared and findings from interviews will remain anonymous.

Survey link: https://uic.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_2iufVmplRiT3uRw

If you qualify, a member of the research team will contact you about scheduling an interview.

This research is being conducted in partnership with the Institute for Healthcare Delivery Design (IHDD) at the University of Illinois Chicago. IHDD is an organization located within the University of Illinois Chicago that works with a variety of organizations to improve systems, services, and experiences that contribute to people's overall health and wellbeing.

The findings from this research will help IDVA better serve veterans and their families by identifying what services veterans need today and in the future. Your input is extremely important to the work. Please consider participating and helping build an improved IDVA.

For any questions, please contact the IHDD team at: ilvetresearch@uic.edu.

Field Services



Veteran Service Officer Michael Willis participated in the Worth Townships' Community Resource Fair on Wednesday May 3rd.



Metro Region Supervisor Robert Iverson, his sister Penny Iverson-Lawrence, and niece Brooke Lawrence participated in the University of Illinois Chicago 3K Walk and Roll hosted by the University's Student Veterans Affairs.

New VSO Office

The VSO office in Madison County moved from Edwardsville to East Alton with Doug Figge as its VSO. The new office location is: 125 W St. Louis Ave, East Alton, IL 62024. You can reach Doug at (217) 685-5469 or by email: doug.figge@illinois.gov.

Hours: 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM, M-F, by appointment only.



Lorenzo A. Fiorentino, Commander American Legion Post 335, and IDVA Metro Region Supervisor Robert Iverson attend the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County Legislative Town Hall in River Grove on April 20th.

Illinois Joining Forces

Many members of Field Services attended the Illinois Joining Forces (IJF) Annual Summit, "Connect Illinois," where ideas were exchanged and information shared. IDVA values the partnership of IJF and the other Veteran Service Organizations with the shared mission of elevating the lives of Veterans in Illinois. The Summit was highly focused on Veteran suicide prevention where participants learned from experts about the warning signs of suicide and how to find help for those in crisis. Breakout sessions focused on women Veterans and homelessness. IDVA appreciates the opportunity to participate in this annual summit, which brings together the best in the industry.



Left to right: Metro Region Supervisor Robert Iverson, Field Training Coordinator Ken Bonner, Northern Region Supervisor Melissa Beckford, Field Services Manager Mark Patterson, and Southern Region Supervisor Jeff Lewis.



New Life Insurance Benefit

VALife is the new low-cost life insurance benefit to Veterans with service-connected disabilities which launched this past January. To learn more about its benefits and if you qualify: visit: [Veterans Affairs Life Insurance \(VALife\) | Veterans Affairs](#)



Director Prince delivers the keynote address.

The Illinois General Assembly is scheduled to conclude its spring 2023 legislative session on Friday, May 19th.

During the legislative session, IDVA's Legislative Liaison tracked up to 168 different bills that could affect the agency or Veterans. At this point in time, 66 of those bills are still moving through the legislative process and 11 are directly related to veterans.

Here are a few bills that are almost through the legislative process. Please note that these bills are not laws yet!

HB 2500: [HB 2500](#) amends the Animal Welfare Act to provide that an animal shelter or animal control facility shall waive the adoption fee for a dog or cat if the person adopting the dog or cat does the following:

1. Presents a current and valid Illinois driver's license with the word "veteran" printed on its face, a current and valid Illinois Identification Card with the word "veteran" printed on its face, or an identification card issued under the federal Veterans Identification Card Act of 2015, and a valid Illinois driver's license or valid Illinois Identification Card.
2. Complies with the adoption policies of the facility. An animal shelter or animal control facility may limit the number of adoptions to one dog or cat per Veteran in a two-year period.

SB 1376: [SB 1376](#) amends the Homeless Family Placement Act. Under current law, a "referring agency" must consider seven factors when referring a homeless family to a shelter. They are as follows: potential for a child's academic and social success, a family history of domestic violence, the family's employment status, the family's job training opportunities, the proximity of other familial support, the availability of shelter resources appropriate to the family's needs and other social, psychological and health considerations.

SB 1376 would add "military status" as an eighth factor. Military status would be added to determine the family's eligibility for State or federal benefits or other supportive services for homeless Veterans and their families.

SB 2005: [SB 2005](#) amends the Housing Authorities Act by adding a new section. It requires housing authorities to develop and implement policies granting housing preferences to Veterans who are homeless. It provides that such preferences shall be cumulative with any other preference allowed by a housing authority for which the veteran qualifies.

HB 2856: [HB 2856](#) amends the Vital Records Act. It provides that a death certificate may include or may be amended to include whether a military service-related injury contributed to the cause of death. The bill is not effective until 1/1/2025.

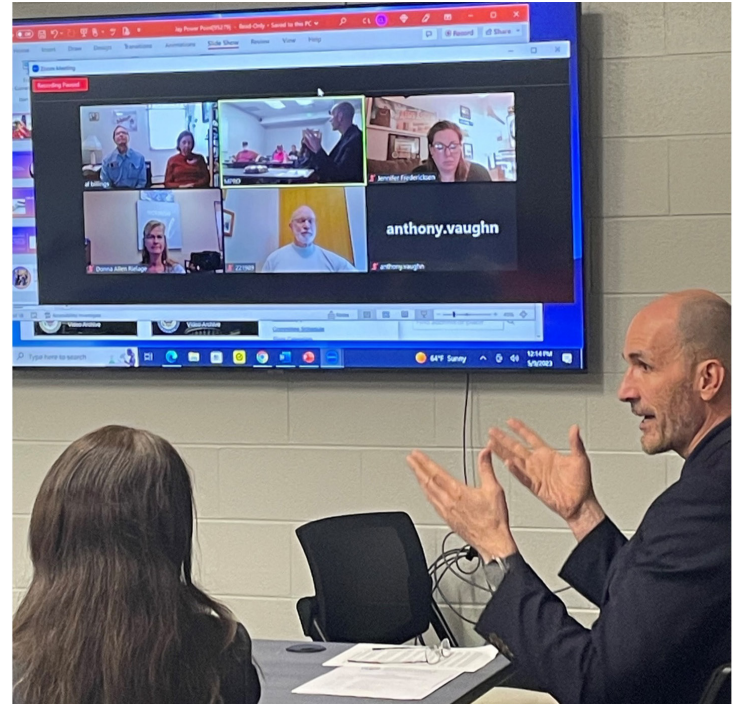
Health and Wellness

Healthy Minds Healthy Bodies

Healthy Minds Healthy Bodies, developed by Allen-Force, is a wellness program offered at licensed fitness centers to accommodate the unique needs of Veterans. It promotes healthy living, fitness, and camaraderie with a community based platform. Participating Veterans receive:

- Two, one year memberships (veteran and chosen "PT PARTNER") to promote healthy fitness habits and an outlet for stress relief.
- Up to 15 personal training sessions with a qualified Healthy Minds Healthy Bodies professional.
- Monthly networking opportunities which provide mentoring, peer support, connecting with other Veteran organizations, and adapted sport experiences.

The monthly networking events include Fireside Chats to learn about benefits, services, and resources available to Veterans. This month, Director Prince and VSO Michael Jay spoke about the PACT Act, which is the biggest expansion of Veteran health care and benefits in generations. Michael Jay spoke to the specifics about the PACT Act and how IDVA VSOs are equipped to help Veterans file claims. Learn more about the PACT Act here: [Veterans and survivors have filed more than 500,000 toxic exposure-related benefits claims under the PACT Act \(va.gov\)](#). For more information on Healthy Minds/Healthy Bodies [click here](#).



Director Prince addresses the hybrid event.



Michael Jay provides details of the PACT Act and addressed questions after the program.



Be Physically Active

Healthy Living Message



What's Important to Know?

To feel better and improve your health, you can:

- Avoid inactivity
- Move more
- Sit less

Being active can lower the risk of:

- Depression
- Type 2 diabetes
- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Obesity
- Stroke
- 8 types of cancer

Being active may:

- Reduce the risk of weight gain, dementia, and falls
- Improve bone health and endurance
- Help you feel more energetic

Anything that gets the body moving counts as physical activity. It can be moderate intensity, when you can talk while being active, or it can be vigorous intensity, when you can only say a few words without taking a breath. Choose activities that you enjoy. Start at a comfortable level and gradually increase the intensity.

Any amount of activity is better than none. Aim for at least 2½ hours of moderate-intensity or 1¼ hours of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity each week, or a combination of both.

Do strength activities at least twice each week using muscles from all parts of your body—the legs, hips, back, chest, abdomen, shoulders, and arms. Stretching regularly can improve flexibility, joint motion, circulation, and help relieve stress.



Being active is safe for almost everyone, and its health benefits far outweigh the risks. If you have symptoms such as chest pain or pressure, dizziness, or joint pain, or are concerned about a chronic condition, talk to your health care team before increasing activity.

Want to Know More?

To learn more about being active, or making a healthy living change, talk with your VA health care team.

You can find additional information and resources at VA's Prevention website using the QR code above or the link below:
https://www.prevention.va.gov/Healthy_Living/Be_Physically_Active.asp



Monthly Highlights

Upcoming Events

Monday, May 29, 2023, 2 p.m.
in Veterans' Hall

Presentation of Colors • Guest Speaker
Roll Call of the Deceased • Rifle Salute & Taps
Retirement of Colors • Patriotic Music

Open to IVH-M Veterans only.
Pie and coffee immediately following the program.

Springfield Lucky Horseshoes presents
MILITARY APPRECIATION NIGHT

FRIDAY, JUNE 16TH | 6:30PM
ROBIN ROBERTS STADIUM

Honoring Active Duty Military and Military Veterans
ALL MILITARY GET IN FREE WITH ID

Check out all of the *Shoes News* for upcoming events and tickets!

SPONSOR VETERAN TICKETS
RED SPONSOR LEVEL \$1,000 INVESTMENT

- Logo on the "Welcome Heroes" sign at the main entry as a red level sponsor
- Vikes board recognition as a red level sponsor
- Sponsors 100 complimentary tickets for Military personnel and their family members
- 20 tickets for your business or organization for the game
- Opportunity to have a marketing table on the concourse
- Opportunity to have a representative throw out a first pitch

WHITE SPONSOR LEVEL \$500 INVESTMENT

- Logo on the "Welcome Heroes" sign of the main entry as a white level sponsor
- Sponsors 50 complimentary tickets for Military personnel and their family members
- 20 tickets for your business or organization for the game

BLUE SPONSOR LEVEL \$250 INVESTMENT

- Logo on the "Welcome Heroes" sign of the main entry as a blue level sponsor
- Sponsors 25 complimentary tickets for Military personnel and their family members
- 10 tickets for your business or organization for the game

Veterans' Home at Quincy Memorial Day 2023

Friday, May 26th

Fifer (9:00 a.m.) and Hammond Hall (9:45 a.m.) Program

- Salute the Colors
- Invocation (Rev. Dave Hall)
- Comments by Administrator Troy Culbertson)
- Comments by IDVA Director Terry Prince
- Wreath Laying (by a resident in that building)
- Taps (American Legion Post #37)
- Benediction (Fr. Zach Edgar)

Markword/Community (10:30 a.m.) Program

- Unfurling of Colors (American Legion Post #37)
- National Anthem (Last Band Standing)
- Invocation (Rev. Dave Hall)
- Welcome by Administrator Troy Culbertson)
- Keynote Address by IDVA Director Terry Prince
- Patriotic Song (Last Band Standing)
- Wreath Laying (by a resident in that building)
- Taps & Rifle Salute (American Legion Post #37)
- Benediction (Fr. Zach Edgar)
- God Bless America (led by Last Band Standing)

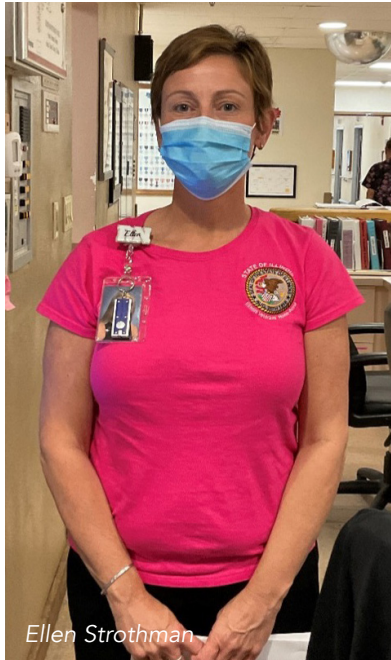
Please note all times are approximate.

Nurses Week

This month, we set aside a week to recognize IDVA's nurses during National Nurses Week. Nurses play a critical role in implementing their knowledge and skills and sharing their compassion. In addition to the medical skills they practice every day, they offer small gestures with big impact – remembering a favorite snack, closing a blind, or listening to a story.

The nurses across the state are the foundation of our care and, along with other health care professionals in our Homes, they care for the whole person. We join Veterans and their families in thanking them for their service.

Veteran's Home at Anna



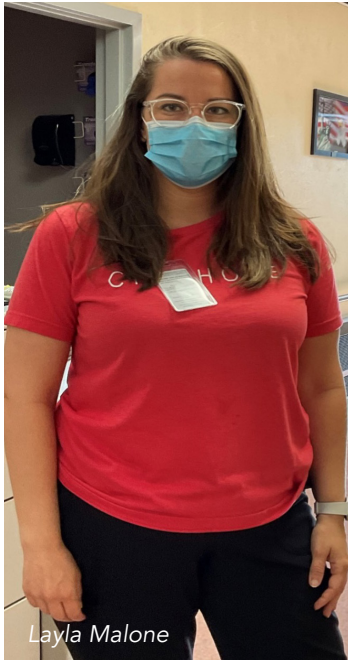
Ellen Strothman



Anita Prader, Debbie Holcomb, and Missy McIntosh



Robin Leaton



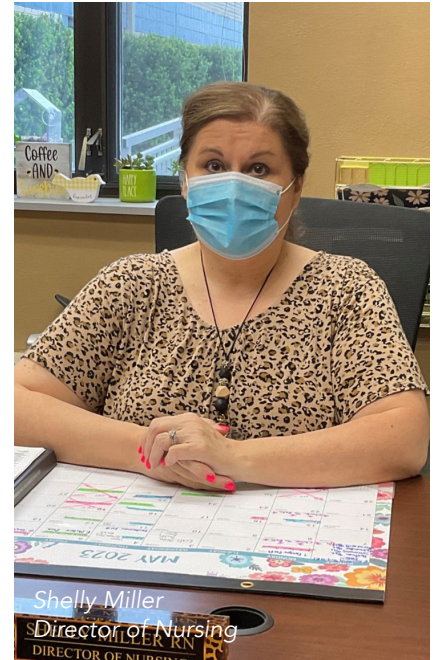
Layla Malone



Assistant Director of Nursing
Lori Godwin

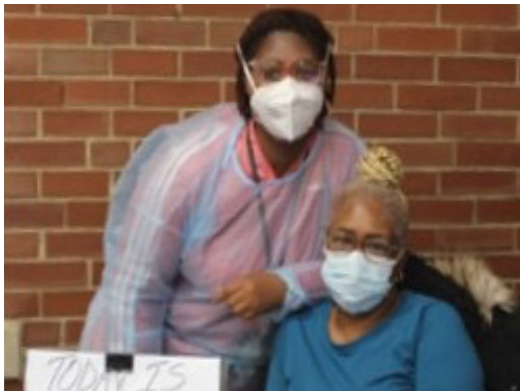


Melissa Waun



Shelly Miller
Director of Nursing

Veterans' Home at Manteno



Tiffany Armstead RN Care plan coordinator
and Linda Mingo 1W VNAC



Sylvanee Clayton, RN, Unit 4E



Sarah Wagacha, RN, Unit 2E

Veterans' Home at Quincy



Congratulations to RN Lisa Bohan (Hammond Nursing) for being named the recipient of the Patty Goehl Award for Excellence in Nursing. Lisa is pictured (holding her plaque) with Administrator Troy Culbertson, IVHQ RN Tori Dameron, IVHQ VNAC John Goehl, and Director of Nursing, Julia Togarepi. Also pictured are her husband, David, daughter, Lexanna, and son, Daulton.

Veterans' Home at Chicago



Left to Right: Jennifer Malone ADON, Mercy Kuriakose PSA, Nisha Mani MDS, and Cheryl LaCour PSA



L-R: Nisha Mani MDS, Mercy Kuriakose PSA, Jennifer Malone ADON, and Cheryl LaCour PSA



Akhila Raju, RN I



L-R: Feba Kuruville RN I, Mariya John RN I, Jennifer Malone, Assistant Director of Nursing



Team Chicago

Veterans' Home at LaSalle



National Skilled Nursing Home Care Week

During Skilled Nursing Home Care Week IDVA recognizes its teams at the five homes - Anna, Chicago, LaSalle, Manteno, and Quincy. Beginning with the oldest home Quincy, founded in 1886, sitting on 210 picturesque acres, to the newest home in Chicago, an open-concept home, each offers person-centered care delivered by medical professionals and staff dedicated to enhancing the lives of Veterans in their care. They strive to care for the whole person through a high-level of medical care, personalized nutrition plans, stimulating programs and activities, and providing the Veteran and families a welcoming and warm community. If you or a loved one are interested in learning more, visit the IDVA website: <https://www2.illinois.gov/veterans/>.

Thank you to the amazing teams at the five homes for their professionalism, dedication, and commitment to compassionate care. You are making a difference in the lives of Illinois Veterans.

National Skilled Nursing Care Week



Anna



Chicago



LaSalle



Manteno



Quincy



Illinois Veterans' Accountability Unit (VAU)



Do you have a Compliment,
Recommendation,
Question, or Complaint?

IDVA.accountability@illinois.gov

1-855-660-7011

<https://veterans.illinois.gov/>



The Veterans' Home at Anna Welcomes its New Administrator Amy Keistler



Amy brings more than 20 years of Nursing Care experience having served in leadership roles at Brookdale Senior Living and Metropolis Rehabilitation & Health. Amy was also the Chief Operations Officer for Chateau Girardeau and an RN/Clinical Specialist for AMT/Restorix-Health. She is an expert team builder, communicator, and new program implementor.

"Amy offers the essential blend of professionalism, skills, and compassion to lead the team of medical professionals and staff at the Veterans' Home at Anna," said Angela Simmons, IDVA Senior Home Administrator and former Administrator of the Home. "Amy's connection with the residents and staff was evident in her first meeting. We are beyond thrilled to have her leading the Anna Team."

"I am grateful for this opportunity to serve our nations heroes and their families and to join the IDVA team in its mission to provide Veterans with quality services and in an environment always striving for excellence."

World War II Letters Returned to Family

Rebecca Wilder, Volunteer coordinator at the Veterans' Home at Manteno, was delighted to deliver a box of letters shared between a World War II Veteran and his wife to their grandson Chris Taglieri. The box of letters was found in a Chicago home and brought to the Anna Home in hopes it could find relatives of the authors of the letters. Becky took to Facebook and wrote a message to a person who shared the same last name. He replied as the author's grandson. He now has a hand-written history of his grandparents.



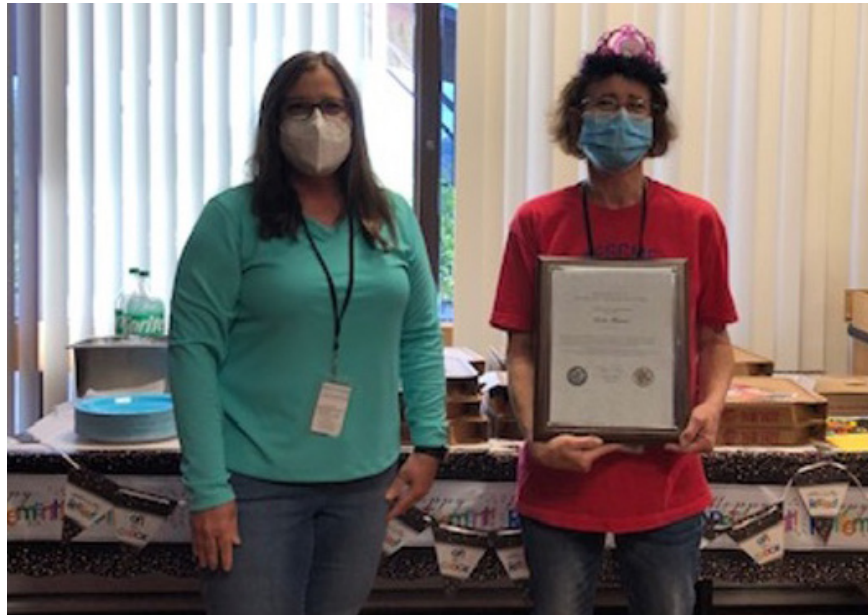
Becky Wilder, Manteno Veterans' Home Volunteer Coordinator, and Chris Taglieri, grandson of the authors of the letters.



Veterans' Home at Anna Announces New On-site Therapists

The Veterans' Home at Anna and EmpowerMe Wellness, which provides specialized, on-site Physical, Occupational, and Speech therapy and focused Wellness programs, have become partners in providing services to the home's residents. EmpowerMe therapists will perform safety assessments, create balance and fall reduction programs, offer language and cognitive training, and become an integrated part of the community. EmpowerMe focuses on making treatment sessions effective, purposeful, and fun! Together, the resident and their therapist will discuss a customized plan designed to help reach their personal goals. These personalized therapies will help the residents remain functionally independent in our community. Through this partnership, we'll provide an enhanced continuum of care to our residents that is critical in today's senior living environment.

Thank you to Debbie Holcomb for 29 years of service



Thank you to Debbie Holcomb for 29 years of service as an LPN to the Veterans' Home at Anna. Amy Keistler (left) presented Debbie Holcomb (right) with a plaque commemorating the day.

Our mission at the IDVA is very simple. To serve those who have served. In doing so, we serve not only the men and women who have worn the uniform, but also their families. It is our privilege to be able to help our veterans receive the benefits they have earned through service to our nation. Our goal is to empower our veterans and their families to thrive in all aspects of their lives.

We know there are many veterans within our great state who do not require any assistance – but we still want to encourage you to “Stand Up and Be Counted!” by registering with your local VSO. In doing so, you're helping IDVA to do a better job of planning for services, seeking federal funding and understanding the needs of our veteran communities statewide. Click here to register.

We thank you for your service and for your sacrifice and we at the IDVA look forward to offering our services to you.



Illinois Department of
Veterans' Affairs

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