

# VETERANS CONNECTIONS

News from the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs ★ Volume 3, Issue 8 ★ November 2023



## ★ Message from IDVA Director Terry Prince

November was an exciting time for IDVA as we honored veterans throughout the month with events, programs, and parades. Team IDVA spread across the state to share its gratitude and show veterans that we are here to serve them. At the tip of the spear, you will find our Veteran Service Officers (VSOs). They help veterans and their families get the benefits that are available to them and work tirelessly on your behalf, especially with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs for compensation and pension. VSOs are veterans--and licensed professionals--who offer these services FREE OF CHARGE. You should never pay someone to do what our VSOs do. They

are state employees committed to helping you thrive in Illinois. To locate your closest VSO, [follow this link](#) or simply call us at 1-800-437-9824

To honor the passing of former First Lady Rosalynn Carter, I would like to recognize her important work for our largest group of employees, the caregivers. In her words, "There are four kinds of people in this world: those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers, those who will be caregivers, and those who will need caregivers." In the veteran space, caregiving is central to those who may have experienced significant illness or injury. At IDVA, we have five Veterans Homes providing caregiving services to our most vulnerable population, elderly veterans living in the Veterans' Homes. As part of her dedication to caregiving, Mrs. Carter established the Rosalynn Carter Center for Caregiving. She designed a program specifically for the military, Operation Family Caregiver (OFC). It provides one-on-one coaching for families and friends providing care for post 9/11 service members and veterans. You can learn more about this [program here](#).

As we approach December, we would like to invite you to participate in Operation Rising Spirit, a letter-writing campaign of holiday wishes for the veterans in IDVA's five residential homes in Anna, Chicago, LaSalle, Manteno, and Quincy. Last year, we received over 5,000 cards to send to veterans in the homes. These notes brought a smile to their faces and holiday cheer into the homes. You can send the notes to:

Operation Rising Spirit  
Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs  
833 South Spring Street  
Springfield, IL 62704

Or visit our website to send an [electronic note](#).

You can even share this [short message](#) about the campaign.

Finally, while December is typically one of the most joyful times of the year, please consider all those in your world who may be struggling with loneliness, depression, or loss. I think about those who are deployed far from home and the families who have lost a loved one over the past year. Simple gestures such as a phone call, visit, or invitation, can lift the spirits of someone who would benefit from holiday cheer.

**Wishing you and yours a blessed Holiday Season.**

Sincerely, **Terry Prince**, IDVA Director



# Monthly Spotlight

## Veterans Day



### Springfield Veterans Day Parade

IDVA, along with the Navy Club, Interveterans Council of Sangamon County, and the County Interveterans Burial Detail of Sangamon County hosted the 11th annual Veterans Day Parade on November 11th followed by a luncheon and program.



L-R: Director Terry Prince, Springfield Ward 7 Alderman Brad Carlson, Springfield Mayor Misty Buscher, Parade Organizer Phil Brown, also Commander of the InterVeterans Council of Sangamon County, and IDVA's Senior Program Policy Advisor Crystal Womack.



Veterans' Home at Quincy



Veterans' Home at Anna



Veterans' Home at LaSalle



Veterans Home at Chicago: Director of Nursing Dr. King, Assistant Director Anthony Vaughn, and Administrator T'Kira Siler-Wilkerson



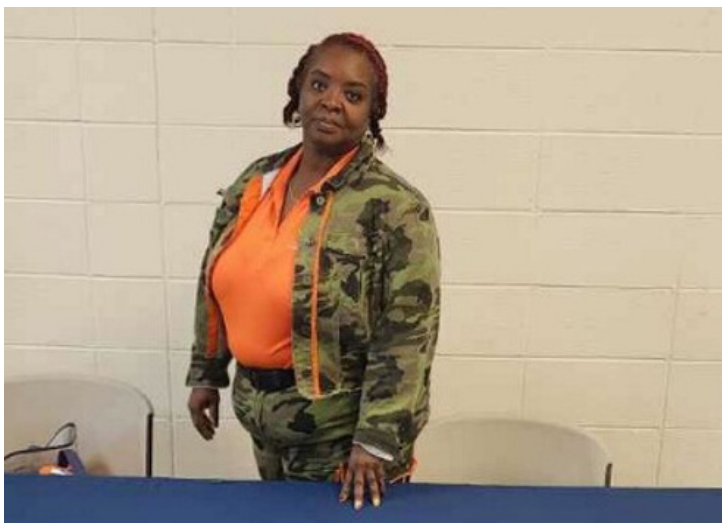
# Monthly Spotlight



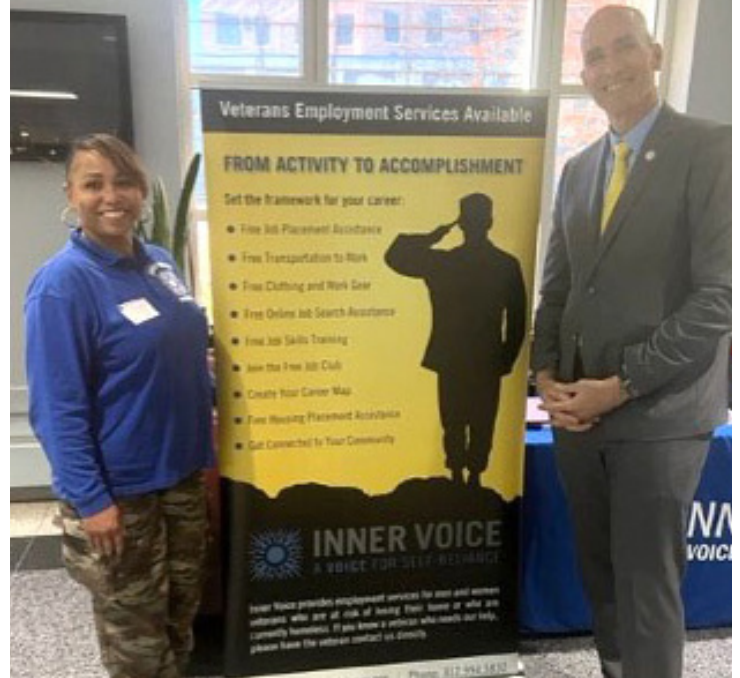
City of Chicago Veterans Day Program at Soldier Field: Assistant Director Anthony Vaughn



Field Service Manager Mark Patterson, Northern Region Supervisor Melissa Beckford, and Melissa's mother Esmeralda Durbin attended the Rock Valley College Veterans Day Event and a viewing of the documentary *Take Your Notes* which features Melissa Beckford with other veterans from the Rockford area.



Veteran Service Officer Cynthia McKee (Chicago) attends the Bellwood Veterans Day Resource Fair.



Inner Voice, Inc. Veterans Day Program and Giveaway at the Jessie Brown Medical Center. Director Prince with Diana Mitchell, Chief Program Officer.



Director Prince and Kris Wellman show off a beautifully crafted blanket for veterans.

Over 150 fifth-grade students from six Springfield area Catholic schools, St. Agnes, St. Aloysius, St. Patrick, Blessed Sacrament, Christ the King, and Little Flower, assisted by students from Sacred Heart-Griffin High School, enjoyed an afternoon creating 61 fleece blankets for veterans who reside in Illinois' five Veterans' Homes. This project was part of the annual 5th Grade Day of Service. Along with making the blankets, the students crafted poppy cards with messages thanking veterans for their service to our nation. Each school contributed funds to purchase over 60 boxes of pudding, cookies, and Nutri Grain bars for the veterans' enjoyment.



# Field Services



Melissa Beckford, Northern Region Supervisor, shares her story as a service member and veteran at the Veterans Town Hall on October 25th at the Pritzker Military Museum and Library. The Town Hall was an opportunity for veterans to publicly share their stories and for listeners to hear and learn more about what military service means and its lasting impact on those who serve. Founded by Sebastian Junger, author of "TRIBE: On Homecoming and Belonging, and Seth Moulton, the first Veterans Town Hall was held in Massachusetts on Veterans Day in 2015. Since then, dozens of town hall events have been held across the country. The town halls are community forums aimed at establishing greater understanding between local veterans and the friends and neighbors they served. The Chicago Veterans Town Hall was hosted by IDVA, Edelman, Chicago Veterans, Pritzker Military Museum and Library, and Pepsi-Co. Following the Veterans Town Hall, a resource fair was held for veterans to learn more about the programs and services available to them.



Veterans Stand Down Event in Rockford attended by VSO Matthew Taylor (Winnebago), Northern Region Supervisor Melissa Beckford, and VSO Debbie Fuehrer ( Winnebago).



Veteran Service Officer Michelle Richards (Chicago), Speaker of the Illinois House of Representatives Chris Welch, and Metro Region Supervisor Robert Iverson attend the Serving Working Families Every Day event in Forest Park on October 28th.



IDVA VSO Team Metro met at the Veterans' Home at Chicago for a Metro/CMC "Region Day." The day included training, a tour of the home, and visit with residents.

## Fall Veto Session

The Illinois General Assembly's fall veto session was held October 24-26 and November 7-9, in Springfield, IL. [HB 2507](#), the property tax omnibus bill that contained changes to the Homestead Exemption for Veterans with Disabilities, was vetoed in August. The veto was due to a property tax provision related to nursing homes. It was not the result of changes to the Homestead Exemption for Veterans with Disabilities. Despite this, the amendatory veto prevented the entire bill from becoming law. Therefore, HB 2507, the property tax omnibus bill containing changes to the Homestead Exemption for Veterans with Disabilities, needed to be addressed during the fall veto session.

Instead of addressing the amendatory veto directly, legislators decided to take most of the legislative language from HB 2507 and place it on an amendment to SB 2315. As a result, [SB 2315](#) became the new bill containing changes to the Homestead Exemption for Veterans with Disabilities. The veterans language in SB 2315 is identical to the veterans language that was in HB 2507, and the summary is as follows:

SB 2315 is the Property Tax Omnibus bill. SB 2315 makes four major changes to the Homestead Exemption for Veterans with Disabilities section of the Property Tax Code. First, it changes the name of the "Homestead Exemption for Veterans with Disabilities" to the "Homestead Exemption for Veterans with Disabilities and Veterans of WWII", creating a property tax exemption for all WWII veterans, regardless of their disability ratings. Second, it provides that for taxable year 2024 and thereafter, for veterans that are rated 70% or higher, "the first \$250,000 in equalized assessed value of the property is exempt from taxation", regardless of the value of the property. Previously, the overall value of the property was taken into consideration. Third, it provides that for taxable year 2024 and there-

after, the definition of "veteran" no longer requires an "honorable discharge." Rather, the veteran must have a service-connected disability for which the veteran receives disability compensation. Fourth, it specifies that the Act cannot be used as the basis for a property tax appeal for previous tax years. The bill has an immediate effective date; however, many of the provisions do not take effect until taxable year 2024.

*Here is an overview of the evolution of this bill:*

11/8/23: [House Floor Amendment \(HFA\) 1](#) to SB 2315 was filed and referred to Rules Committee.

11/9/23: HFA 1 to SB 2315 was referred to Executive Committee.

HFA 1 to SB 2315 was heard in Executive Committee.

HFA 1 to SB 2315 was adopted, and the bill was debated on the House Floor. SB 2315 as amended passed out of the House with a [103-0-1 vote](#).

SB 2315 as amended was sent to the Senate where it was placed on the Calendar Order of Concurrence-House Amendment(s) 1.

The Senate still needs to concur with the House's amendment and pass the bill as amended out of their chamber. Then, the Governor will need to sign the bill. A few steps remain before this bill can become a law, and the General Assembly will not reconvene until 1/16/24.

For now, this is IDVA's update on the proposed changes to the Homestead Exemption for Veterans with Disabilities. If you are interested, please keep reading Veterans Connections for future updates on this effort.





## New Director of Human Resources



On November 1st, **Beatris Gonzalez** joined IDVA as its Human Resources Director after an 18-year tenure with the Illinois Department of Human Services. In her most recent role as the Bureau Chief of Basic Support within the Office of Adult Services and Basic Support, she was responsible for overseeing and managing the administrative aspects of vital federally funded programs. Beatris' experience as an administrator has allowed her to develop a comprehensive skill set in all aspects of HR, including recruitment, talent development, employee relations, and compliance. She has had the opportunity to lead and collaborate on various projects, including unit developments that have resulted in increased employee satisfaction and retention. She also has extensive experience within nonprofit organizations has instilled in her a deep sense of empathy, integrity, and self-motivation. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from the University of Illinois in Chicago.

"IDVA is fortunate to have Beatris leading our Human Resources efforts," said Director Terry Prince. " She is dedicated to fostering a more inclusive and diverse workplace and committed to ensuring all staff receive the necessary support and access to programs aimed at helping them to meet their individual needs and achieve their professional goals."

## New Women Veterans Coordinator



IDVA Welcomes **Margo Watson** as its new Women Veterans Coordinator. Margo joins IDVA from the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services, Division of Child Support Services in Cook Appeals, and more recently in the Cook Accounting Maintenance Unit. Before state government, she worked with DeVry University and its affiliated schools such as Keller Graduate School and Chamberlain College of Nursing as an Academic Advisor III.

Margo currently serves in the United States Army Reserve and has achieved the rank of Sergeant First Class working as a Human Resource Specialist and Senior Instructor, with the 5th Battalion, 100th Regiment in Homewood, IL. Ms. Watson earned her bachelor's and master's degrees at Lincoln University in Jefferson City, MO.

"Margo's experience in state government and her military service equips her to be a stellar Women Veterans Coordinator for IDVA," said Director Prince. "She is passionate about supporting Illinois' women veterans and we are excited about her ideas for expanding and enhancing the program."

# Veterans' Homes



## Veterans' Home at Chicago in the News

The Veterans' Home at Chicago was the Veterans Day feature story for CBS News on November 9th. The story featured Business Administrator and U.S. Army Veteran Brittney Chitwood and IT Specialist and U.S. Air Force veteran Aaron Gray who spoke about the rewards of working at the home and serving veterans. Director Terry Prince and Home Administrator T'Kira Siler-Wilkerson were also interviewed by the reporter Lauren Viceroy. Each one presented their perspective on the need for more staff at the Home to welcome more veterans home to Chicago. [Click here](#) to view the story



*CBS News Reporter Lauren Victory with Business Administrator Brittney Chitwood.*



*Lauren Victory with IT Specialist Aaron Gray.*



*Lauren Victory with Administrator T'Kira Siler-Wilkerson*



*Lauren Victory with Director Terry Prince*



# Veterans' Homes

## Chicago Dogs Ballgame Outing

The Office of the Attorney General's Veterans and Servicemember Employee Resource Group join Veterans' Home of Chicago residents to take in a Chicago Dogs game.



# Vendor Summit

**2023**  
STATE OF ILLINOIS  
**VENDOR**  
**SUMMIT**

The 2023 Vendor Summit is a key outreach initiative in the state's efforts to diversify its vendor pool and provide equitable access to contracting opportunities for small, minority-owned, veteran-owned, women-owned, and other disadvantaged firms, including firms owned or operated by people with disabilities. The Summit will include workshops, an exhibit hall and sessions to encourage networking of contractors with diverse firms of all sizes and types.

This Summit will take place on Thursday, November 30, 2023 at the UIC Student Center East, 750 S. Halsted St., Chicago, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. (CST).

This event is a collaboration with the Illinois Public Higher Education Cooperative (IPHEC), Illinois Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM), and IDOT. Interested vendors can REGISTER and LEARN MORE at [www.illinois.gov/vendorsummit](http://www.illinois.gov/vendorsummit).

**#CMS #IL #whyIL #procurement #vendors #business #networking #collaboration #opportunities #contractors #smallbusinesses #vendorsummit**



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

## Illinois Veterans' Accountability Unit (VAU)

### Let us Know!

If you are an Illinois Veteran or other Illinois resident who seeks services from the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs (IDVA); a resident of any Illinois Veterans' Home, a family member of a resident, a visitor of any Illinois Veterans' Home; a vendor and/or contractor of the IDVA; or staff of the IDVA, we want to hear from you.

This office welcomes feedback about the services being provided to the Veterans of Illinois. If you received exceptional service or have concerns about poor performance involving any member of the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs, please let us know.

Email us at

[IDVA.accountability@illinois.gov](mailto:IDVA.accountability@illinois.gov)

or Call our Toll-Free Helpline

**1-855-660-7011**

More information about the VAU can be found on the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs website

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

The VAU maintains the confidentiality of investigations, complainants, and witnesses to the maximum extent allowable, but must disclose complaints to the Office of the Executive Inspector General (OEIG).

You can obtain more information about the OEIG or file a complaint with the OEIG directly through its website at <https://oeig.illinois.gov/>.

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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