



★ Message from IDVA Director Terry Prince

As we close 2022, I would like to thank all of you who have been part of the IDVA community. We hope that by staying connected, you feel heard and supported by IDVA. Our mission is for veterans to thrive in Illinois, and our team of 1,200 dedicated staff each serve a role to help us achieve this mission. In FY22 our 53 Veteran Service Officers assisted over 15,000 veterans and filed over 17,000 claims securing \$3,462,915 in claims. Our VSOs go to the ends of the earth to ensure that veterans obtain their earned benefits and services, and it's not always easy. In many circumstances the VSO is a counselor, confidant, and a friend. Their scope of work spans from unraveling complicated individual cases to providing fishing licenses. The State Approving Agency provided Illinois veterans with opportunities to train at 1,118 approved education and training facilities. The State Approving Agency also approved 596 apprenticeship and on-the-job training facilities for the use of veterans, military service members, and their families. The SAA's efforts have resulted in Illinois leading the nation in active apprenticeship and OJT programs. Mark Patterson, Field Services Manager, and Dan Wellman, Veterans Education and Training (VETS) Administrator, lead these teams, and I am grateful for their commitment as veterans and IDVA leadership.

We also awarded over \$932,000 in grants to advance veterans programs through the Veterans' Cash Lottery program.

IDVA is also supported by a strong Central team with offices in Chicago and Springfield that provide strategic direction including communications, fiscal, human resources, information and technology, legal, legislative, operations, and programs. Each person's contribution is critical and together, we stand united to achieve our mission of serving Illinois' veterans at the highest level.

When I began this role in April 2021, I presented a Six-Point Plan for the Future of IDVA. As I reported to the General Assembly last spring, Mission Accomplished. Key leadership roles were filled including Chief of Staff, Senior Home Administrator, Women Veterans and Program Manager, Infection Preventionist, Legislative Liaison, Public Information Officer, and an administrator for the Veteran's Home at LaSalle. Having served in their roles for several months, their contributions are evident and will continue to impact the mission of IDVA. We clearly defined roles and fostered interdepartmental collaboration. Communication makes all this possible by enhancing dialogue which we've achieved through agency-wide email and my weekly Tuesdays with Terry message. It is imperative that we have two-way communications so that IDVA employees in the field and in Central and Chicago office are well connected. We also redesigned IDVA's website making it more accessible and user-friendly and rebranded all agency collateral.

For the veterans' homes, infection control is the highest priority in addressing COVID-19 and any other potential infection. The homes have strict protocols, procedures, and policies in place to prevent infiltration and mitigate spread. We welcomed a new Infection Preventionist who is working closely with each home to guide them in adhering to the systems in place to protect veterans and staff, and we are in the process of developing Infection Control committees within each home.

Over the past year, we have strengthened existing policies and introduced new ones to address the evolving needs of our veterans and how we serve them. We are also updating our technology needs at the Central and Chicago offices and the homes, particularly systems to modernize safety within the homes.

These initiatives have positioned the department to better serve Illinois' veterans, and I am proud of our team for rolling up their sleeves, doing hard work, and staying connected to one another. As we enter 2023, we will continue to strive to serve veterans as they served our nation.

Wishing you and yours a peaceful holiday season and New Year.

As always, thank you for staying connected to IDVA.

Sincerely, **Terry Prince**, IDVA Director



Monthly Highlights

Operation Rising Spirit



There is still time to participate in Operation Rising Spirit - IDVA's letter writing campaign for notes of gratitude to veterans in our residential homes. When we announced the campaign, news outlets around the state responded, and the letters have been pouring in. This is a great family, company, or community holiday volunteer opportunity. For ways to participate visit: <https://www2.illinois.gov/veterans/about-us/events/Pages/Operation-Rising-Spirit-2022.aspx>



Residents of the Veterans' Home at Chicago receive notes of gratitude.

Gold Star Family Christmas Tree

The official lighting of the Illinois State Gold Star Family Christmas tree was held in Chicago on December 5th where for the first time 341 personalized ornaments were placed on the tree honoring Illinois' heroes. Governor JB Pritzker, Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton, IDVA Director Terry Prince, and Brigadier General Rodney Boyd spoke to the families assuring that Illinois stands firmly with Gold Star Families in honoring and remembering all those who gave the ultimate sacrifice.



Assistant Director Anthony Vaughn places an ornament honoring United States Marine First Sergeant Edward Smith who died of wounds received in central Iraq on April 5, 2003. While on active duty, Assistant Director Vaughn was the casualty assistance call officer for First Sergeant Smith's parents.



Monthly Highlights



Gold Star Mother Gay Eisenhower hangs an ornament honoring her son Wyatt D. Eisenhower.

Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day, Springfield



Director Prince carries the wreath for the traditional Pearl Harbor wreath-laying ceremony to honor the Americans that lost their lives during the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.



Gwen Diehl, IDVA's Veterans' Home Coordinator, served as the Master of Ceremonies.





A Review of the ING Grant & IVG Programs

This story is contributed by Stephanie Claudio, ISAC Training Specialist, Partner Services Department

The Illinois National Guard (ING) Grant and the Illinois Veteran Grant (IVG) programs, administered by the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC), are state entitlement programs awarded to eligible applicants regardless of funding levels. Both programs are available at all Illinois state-supported public universities and public community colleges and may be used for undergraduate and graduate level studies.

The ING Grant covers tuition and certain fees (registration, graduation, general activity, matriculation and term fees), and to qualify, applicants must:

- Have completed one full year of service in the Illinois National Guard
- Be active in the Illinois National Guard
- Be an enlisted member or an officer
- Not be in default on a student loan, nor owe a refund on any state or federal grant
- Must maintain an acceptable grade point average (GPA), as determined by the institution

Students may receive benefits for the equivalent of four years of full-time enrollment, and Guard members who have served for at least 10 years may receive up to six years of full-time benefits.

Applicants **must re-apply each year for the ING Grant**, and there are application deadlines established for each term:

- October 1 for full year consideration
- March 1 for spring and summer term consideration
- June 15 for summer-only consideration

For additional information about the ING Grant program, [click here](#).

The IVG program covers tuition and mandatory fees (those that students must pay to obtain educational services), and to qualify, applicants must:

- Must have served at least one year of federal active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces

- Have received an honorable discharge or be honorably serving
- Have been a resident of Illinois at the time of entering federal active duty service or within six months prior, or were a student at a public institution at the time of entering federal active duty service;
- Have established or, if on federal active duty service, plan to establish Illinois residency within six months after leaving federal active duty service
- Reside in Illinois at the time of enrollment in college
- Not be in default on a student loan, nor owe a refund on any state or federal grant
- Must maintain an acceptable grade point average (GPA), as determined by the institution

Students may receive benefits for the equivalent of four years of full-time enrollment.

Applicants may apply for IVG at any time during an academic year and only need to apply once to establish eligibility; they do not need to re-apply each year. When applying for IVG, applicants must provide a copy of their DD Form 214 Member 4, or its equivalent, for all periods of active service.

For more information about the IVG program, [visit](#).

Recent enhancements made to the IVG program as a result of legislative changes include:

- IVG now aligns with other state of Illinois programs that serve veterans in regard to eligibility based on characterization of service. IVG had previously required a veteran to have an honorable discharge from every period of federal active duty service, however, effective July 2022, an amended rule now only requires evaluation of the most recent discharge period of federal active duty service.
- Applicants who did not reside in Illinois at the time of entering service or who did not return to Illinois after separation, may now be eligible if they have been a resident of Illinois for at least 15 consecutive years after leaving federal active duty service and reside in Illinois at the time of application and while enrolled and receiving benefits.

Both the ING Grant and IVG programs may be used with federal VA benefits. When combined with the Post-9/11 GI Bill, the ING Grant and the IVG programs can be considered last payer, and the student's benefit usage (eligibility units) will be prorated based on the percentage of benefits being provided by the state programs.

Additional information and resources about these and other programs are available to military-connected students and their families on ISAC's Military Service page at: isac.org/students/during-college/military-service/index.html.



Women Veterans

Women Veterans and the Iraq War



The War in Iraq began in 2003 and came to an end when the United States declared an end to combat operations in Iraq in December 2011. The mission lasted 8 years, 9 months, and 12 days with more than 1.5 million Americans who served over this

period (DPCC, 2011). The United States tragically lost 4,474 service members (DPCC, 2011).

From March 2003 to December 2011, nearly 300,000 women served across both Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) (Buckley and Thompson, 2021). At the start of OIF in early 2003, women were limited to non-combat roles, yet many women were serving under combat conditions without the acknowledgment of their roles (Pruitt, 2018). However, laws would be lifted allowing women to openly serve in combat roles alongside their male counterparts for the first time in history. By 2017, 166 women had been killed and more than 1,000 injured in combat (Buckley and Thompson, 2021).

Today, post-9/11 women veterans make up over 40% of the female veteran population and continues to grow (Syracuse University, 2022). Women Veterans are not alone in their experiences and have a community of support available to them. As the women veteran population continues to grow in numbers, remember that IDVA is here to support you and your families in helping you navigate your benefits and help connect you to the resources needed. Remember to be on the look-out for upcoming events in March 2023 in honor of Women Veterans Recognition Month!

Source: [fs-112-1-36.pdf \(senate.gov\)](https://www.senate.gov/legislation/records/fs-112-1-36.pdf)

Source: [Introduction: Special Issue on Women and Operation Iraqi Freedom \(journal-veterans-studies.org\)](https://journal-veterans-studies.org/introduction-special-issue-on-women-and-operation-iraqi-freedom/)

Source: https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/IVMF-Missing-Perspectives-Women-in-the-Military-March-2022_v3.pdf

Source: [U.S. Military Lifts Ban on Women in Combat - HISTORY](https://www.history.com/news/us-military-lifts-ban-on-women-in-combat)

Health and Wellness

Holiday Season Resources

The decorations, stores and restaurants are evidence that the holidays are here. Let's remember those who may be hurting through the loss of a loved one, experiencing exaggerated stress of trying to create a joyful holiday for those around us, or challenged by being with extended groups of people. Holidays amplify stress and below are a few resources that may help you:

[VA/News: Holiday Survival Guide for women Veterans Helping Veterans Cope with PTSD during holidays](#)

PACT ACT

The Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs would like to share this message from their US Department of Veterans Affairs partner. We invite you to file claims under the PACT Act or any of your earned benefits through your local IDVA Veterans Service Officer (VSO).

<https://youtu.be/LDH5rcSW0q0>

Field Services

A message from Mark Patterson, Field Services Manager

In December we find ourselves at the end of Fall and the beginning of Winter. Seasons change our landscape, winter brings ice and snow, spring brings leaves and green grass, summer brings heat and longer days, in the fall the leaves change and fall to the ground. Our Southern region is about to experience a new landscape and season as well. Three Veterans Service Officers are leaving the state for their next season.

Harold Power and Ken Ferguson both started on the same day, December 5, 2005. 17 years later, they are going to be leaving within a few days of each other. Gentlemen, you will be missed and your knowledge around Veteran advocacy is extraordinary.

Craig Koch, you may have only been with us for a little over a year, however, your impact was recognized from the beginning. Your contribution will be missed as well.

It has been a privilege working with you. Best wishes in your future and the landscape of the Southern Region will be forever changed.



Michele Richards, Chicago VSO, attends the Army Navy Game event hosted by the Chicago Police Marine Corp League, Department 553.

News from the Capitol

The General Assembly returned for its fall veto session on November 15th and 16th and November 29th through December 1st. While many bills were filed and amended, there were only a few bills related to veterans that were introduced or moved during the five days lawmakers were in Springfield.

The last few days of the 102nd General Assembly, also known as the winter “lame duck session,” will take place from January 4th through the 10th. The 103rd General Assembly, a new two-year legislative period, will begin with Inauguration on January 11th. The 103rd General Assembly will bring new lawmakers to Springfield, committee membership can change, and countless bills will be filed.

For the 103rd General Assembly, IDVA will be focused on presenting its FY24 budget and finding the best ways to serve women veterans and veterans who have recently transitioned out of the military. IDVA will also monitor legislation related to procurement, nursing homes, and agency operations to ensure that its many divisions are aware of possible legislative changes. During the 103rd General Assembly, the Capitol will be under construction. Many offices have been relocated to the Stratton Building, and the Senate Chamber and gallery are closed. They have been temporarily relocated to the Secretary of State’s Howlett Building.

The spring schedule for the Senate can be found [here](#). The spring schedule for the House can be found [here](#).

Partners

IDVA Partners with the National Veterans Legal Services Program

The Illinois Department of Veterans’ Affairs and the National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP) partnered to offer incomparable free access to legal representation for Illinois veterans and their families in appeals before the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (CAVC).

“The partnership between the IDVA and NVLSP is ideal for the state and for Illinois veterans,” said IDVA Director Terry Prince. “Illinois veterans will now have even more access to vital legal representation who will defend their rights at the highest legal levels to ensure fairness in the disability benefits arena. Also, IDVA will capitalize on access to the extensive training and professional development portfolio that NVLSP offers our team. This training will be invaluable as IDVA continues to serve Illinois veterans, now and in the future.”

NVLSP is a national nonprofit organization that has worked since 1981 to ensure the government delivers to our nation’s 22 million veterans and active-duty personnel, the benefits to which they are entitled because of disabilities resulting from their military service to our country.

“We are delighted to work with the Illinois Department of Veterans’ Affairs, and we welcome the opportunity to leverage our shared expertise to help Illinois veter-

ans and their families receive the benefits they have earned,” said NVLSP Executive Director Paul Wright.

When disability claims are denied by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, veterans have the right to appeal to the CAVC. Through this partnership, NVLSP will provide free legal representation in support of appeal cases. This process begins when the NVLSP reviews a case in which a Veteran’s appeal to the Board of Veterans’ Appeals (BVA), the highest authority within the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, is denied and determines there are grounds for an appeal to the CAVC. When this occurs, NVLSP offers to represent the veteran or the veteran’s family at no cost. This strategic partnership between the IDVA and the NVLSP enhances an already robust legal network that includes the Illinois Armed Forces Legal Aid Network and a growing list of organizations, benefactors and volunteers who are wholly committed to serving Illinois’ veterans and ensuring free legal services are available to veterans in need across Illinois.

To learn more about NVLSP, visit www.nvlsp.org.



NVLSP
NATIONAL VETERANS LEGAL SERVICES PROGRAM



Veterans' Homes



The Education & Infection Prevention's Team at Veterans' Home at Manteno put expired supplies to good use as decorations for its Christmas tree.



Chicago Veterans' Home resident Vernon Moore enjoys a tour of Hawaii and an episode of Hawaii Five-O on the home's Virtual Reality headset.



Chicago Veterans' Home resident Robert Bierwirth is all smiles celebrating his 90th birthday.

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
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