



# VETERANS CONNECTIONS

News from the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs ★ Volume 4, Issue 8 ★ August 2024

## ★ Message from IDVA Director Terry Prince



As we close the summer, I thank my dedicated team who has given its all in meeting with veterans across our state at resource, county, and state fairs, picnics, parades, ceremonies, and programs. They have given up summer evenings and weekends with friends and family to inform veterans of their earned benefits and the services IDVA provides. We are fortunate to live in a state where the Administration is dedicated to seeking avenues in veterans' best interests. Recently, Governor JB Pritzker signed a law protecting veterans from "claims sharks," people and services that charge veterans

for assisting with claims. IDVA, county, and federal Veteran Service Officers provide counsel and claims assistance at no cost to veterans. Be aware of "claims sharks" who are taking advantage of veterans. IDVA recently learned of a veteran who paid a service \$100,000 of his \$300,000 claim. Unconscionable. Read on to learn more about this law and its veterans' protections and be on the lookout for scams!

September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, an issue that is extremely important to me. I've shared this message many times, that we must continue our crusade to prevent veteran suicide until the staggering number of 22 veterans taking their lives daily is reduced to zero. During September, please join me in reaching out to the veterans in your life to reinforce that you've got their six and that they are not alone. To learn how you may get involved in preventing veteran suicide, visit the Illinois Governor's Challenge website: [IDHS: Illinois Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans and their Families \(state.il.us\)](https://idhs.illinois.gov/governors-challenge).

As always, thank you for staying connected to IDVA.

Sincerely,

**Terry Prince**, U.S. Navy Veteran and IDVA Director



*IDVA's Central Office in Springfield proudly unveiled its new sign displaying its new logo launched earlier this year.*

## Veteran Consumer Protection Legislation Becomes Law

Governor J.B. Pritzker signed SB 3479, now Public Act 103-0783, which protects veterans from “claim sharks,” who charge fees for assisting a veteran in obtaining their earned benefits and services, while these services are provided at no cost by county, state, and federal governments.

“IDVA has heard unimaginable stories from veterans who have lost thousands of dollars of their earned benefits to services taking advantage of them, often at their most vulnerable,” said IDVA Director Terry Prince. “We are grateful to the bill’s sponsors Senator Mike Porfirio & Representative Stephanie Kifowit, and Governor Pritzker for advocating for veterans by securing these important protections. We encourage veterans to contact IDVA Veterans Service Officers positioned around the state and equipped to help them navigate their benefits and services, free of charge.”

This effort started over two years ago with [Public Act 102-0386](#). Public Act 102-0386, effective January 1, 2022, amended the Consumer Fraud and Deceptive Business Practices Act. It defined “veteran or military benefits services” and provided that a person or company advertising veterans’ benefits services must conspicuously disclose that such services are offered free of charge from county veterans service officers, the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, and federally chartered veterans’ service organizations.

SB 3479, now [Public Act 103-0783](#), amends the same Act. It builds upon existing law in the following ways:

- It expands the definition of “veteran or military benefits services.” The new law adds language to provide that “consulting or coaching in the preparation, presentation or prosecution of claims” is considered a service.
- It requires additional language for veteran services disclosures.
- It provides that failure to provide a veterans’ ‘services disclosure orally and in writing at the outset of the business relationship is an unlawful practice.
- It specifies that Veteran Service Officers be accredited by the VA.

Overall, it ensures there are no loopholes for “claim sharks.” The law is effective January 1, 2025.

### 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/>.



## GI Bill® Turns 80

Throughout the year, the nation recognizes the 80th anniversary of the GI Bill which has changed the trajectory of hundreds of thousands of veterans since its inception. While World War II continued, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, known as the G.I. Bill, was debated in Congress and signed into law on June 22, 1944. The intent was to provide veterans of World War II essential benefits including hospitals, low-interest mortgages, and mostly stipends to cover higher education and vocational schools. Since then, hundreds of thousands of veterans have pursued higher education through the GI Bill leading to successful and meaningful careers.

In 1984, legislation was enacted to provide Vietnam War veterans higher education benefits, and in 2008, the Post 9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act gave veterans on active duty on September 11, 2001, benefits including allowing the transfer of unused educational benefits to their spouses and children. In 2012, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) trademarked the GI Bill to prevent unauthorized educational institutions or vendors from misusing the term. In 2017, the Veterans Educational Assistance Act called the Forever GI Bill became law and expanded GI Bill benefits for eligible veterans and their dependents.

For over a decade, Illinois has been a nationwide leader in applying the GI Bill for apprenticeship and on-the-job training programs, with over 625 such facilities approved and averaging over 1,500 monthly trainees.

In 2023, Illinois averaged 12,500 students or trainees using GI Bill benefits per month. During federal fiscal year 2023, Illinois GI Bill beneficiaries brought in approximately \$220 million in benefits. Over the past 10 years, Illinois has seen \$2.495 billion in GI Bill benefits, averaging under \$250 million annually.

The Illinois State Approving Agency currently has 1,361 programs of education and training facilities approved for GI Bill benefits with 825 of those facilities having at least one active veteran in training or pursuing an education during 2023.

"GI Bill® is a registered trademark of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). More information about education benefits offered by VA is available at the official U.S. government Web site at <http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill>."

Locate your local IDVA VSO: <https://veterans.illinois.gov/serviceoffices/vso-locator-countylist.html>



# ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Monthly Highlights

## Veterans and Gold Star Families Day at the Springfield State Fair

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs and the Veterans Day Committee hosted a full day of programming to honor veterans from across the state. Gold Star Families were honored at the Gold Star Rose ceremony and brunch where each hero was recognized for their service and sacrifice. The main program included remarks from the 41st Adjutant General of the State of Illinois Major General Rodney Boyd, IDVA Director Terry Prince, Department of Agriculture Director Jerry Costello, and Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton who each shared Illinois' gratitude to veterans and its unwavering support. Veterans enjoyed a day of fellowship surrounded by the energy and entertainment of the State Fair.

This year's theme, "Service Across the Generations," resonated with many veterans who proudly followed in the footsteps of a loved one or paved the way for future generations.



Team IDVA marches in the Springfield State Fair Veterans Day Parade.



IDVA Director Terry Prince delivers remarks during the main program at Veterans and Gold Star Families Day at the Springfield State Fair.



Gold Star Rose Ceremony at Veterans Day at the Springfield State Fair.



Veteran Service Officers participate in the Resource Fair at Veterans Day at the Springfield State Fair: Front row left to right: VSO Michele Hansen-Hoback (McLean), VSO Melinda Makinney (Peoria), Central Region Supervisor Kimberly Yantis, VSO Marilda Eadie (Coles), Alfredo Rocha (Sangamon) Back row: VSO Kurt Cochran (Christian), IDVA Director Terry Prince



State Commander Dan Wellman of the Military Order of the Purple Heart presents a check to the Illinois State Fair Veterans Day Committee supporting the Gold Star Families Brunch. Left to right: Senior Programs Manager and Auxiliary MOPH IDVA Crystal Womack, Col. USMC (Ret.) Robert Tyler, Ph.D., and Administrator of the IDVA Veterans Education and Training Dan Wellman.



# ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Monthly Highlights

## Team IDVA at the Veterans Day at the DuQuoin State Fair

Veteran Service Officers and staff of the Veterans' Home at Anna were available for veterans attending the resource fair. The program's team delivered a strong program with keynote addresses from Department of Agriculture Director and Army veteran Jerry Costello, and Marine Corps veteran Dakota Tolbert. As part of this year's theme, "Service Across Generations," Dakota described how her grandfather inspired her to serve. A sit-down lunch was served to nearly 450 veterans and their families. Gold Star families and their heroes were honored at the Gold Star Rose Ceremony.



*VSO Theresa Guyer, Mt. Vernon, Jefferson County, and VSO Chad Roach, Carlinville, Macoupin County.*



*Home Administrator Amy Keistler, Director of Nursing Shelly Miller, Assistant Director of Nursing Lori Godwin, and Adjutant Anthony Barnett.*



*Left to right: Jennifer Franklin, Assistant to the Director, Angela Simmons, Senior Home Administrator, and Crystal Womack, Senior Program Policy Advisor.*



*Department of Agriculture Director Jerry Costello receives a Gold Rose in honor of his best friend and godfather to his daughter from IDVA Assistant Director Anthony Vaughn.*



*Dakota Tolbert shares her inspiration to join the military.*





## Purple Heart Day

On August 7, Purple Heart Day, the nation honored recipients of the Purple Heart, the nation's oldest military award. Nearly two million Purple Heart medals have been awarded to those who have been wounded or killed while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. Purple Heart recipients are entitled to a wide variety of benefits through the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, [Purple Heart Day and VA benefits to recipients - VA News](#). If you are a recipient of the Purple Heart and would like to learn more about your benefits, contact an IDVA Veteran Service Officer: <https://veterans.illinois.gov/serviceoffices.html>.

The Military Order of the Purple Heart offers recipients a supportive community with local chapters across the nation. To learn more and become a member, visit: [Military Order of the Purple Heart](#).

Additionally, The [Purple Heart Foundation](#) is an excellent resource for Purple Heart recipients.

## Marion Stands With Veterans

Director Prince will participate with veterans and staff from the Veterans' Home at Anna. The event honors veterans, Gold Star Families, and first responders. The parade is scheduled close to Patriot's Day to recognize veterans' patriotism. More than 150 entries will walk down Main Street and will conclude at Tower Square with a memorial service for those killed-in-action and Gold Star Mothers.

Stop by the Carnegie Mellon Library throughout the week to view a special video message from IDVA Director Terry Prince about veteran suicide prevention as part of September's Suicide Prevention Awareness Month.

To learn more about the parade, visit: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100070773160568>

## NATIONAL AGENT ORANGE AWARENESS DAY

### Agent Orange Awareness

During the Vietnam War, the U.S. military sprayed a mix of tactical herbicides called Agent Orange to remove dense tropical foliage from trees and plants to reduce enemy cover. The USDVA recognizes that exposure to Agent Orange has resulted in a wide range of diseases and health conditions including leukemia, heart disease, Parkinson's, prostate cancer, diabetes, and more. Eligible veterans who have been exposed can receive health care benefits and an Agent Orange Health exam. Veterans may also be eligible for disability compensation if they have a disability related to Agent Orange exposure and were then discharged.

On February 6, 1991, the Agent Orange Act of 1991 was established. It presumes that any veteran who served during the Vietnam War has been exposed to tactical herbicides. The USDVA offers a variety of resources and compensation for veterans who have been affected by Agent Orange and other herbicides during military service.

If you have been exposed to Agent Orange, visit: [Benefits Overview for Agent Orange Exposure - Public Health \(va.gov\)](#) to learn more about benefits and resources.

## Navy Week at the Veterans' Home in Chicago

Chicago Navy Week brought hundreds of Sailors from across the nation to engage with communities throughout the Chicagoland area. IDVA was honored to host Sailors on three occasions at the Veterans' Home at Chicago. The Vietnam Veterans Commemoration Committee honored 37 Vietnam Veterans living in the home in a moving and meaningful pinning ceremony. Sailors joined residents for a Cubs game watch party where they shared stories about their service and enjoyed a hot dog bar. The Home's garden received attention from Sailors painting its benches. The connection between the Sailors and veterans was evident. It was an exciting week for the Home.

Also, as part of Navy Week, IDVA Director Terry Prince participated in a Navy Week proclamation ceremony with Governor Pritzker on Chicago's Navy Pier. Director Prince shared remarks about his 31-year Navy career and Governor Pritzker proclaimed Chicago Navy Week while fighter jets flew overhead as part of the Air and Water Show. Sailors gathered at Navy Pier to share information with the public and participate in the activities on the Pier. It was a spectacular day on the Pier to honor the U.S. Navy and its Sailors.



*Vietnam Veterans Pinning Ceremony at the Veterans' Home at Chicago.*



*Sailors painting the Navy bench for the Veterans' Home at Chicago's garden.*



*A Vietnam Veteran is pinned by a U.S. Navy Sailor.*



*CEO of Navy Pier Marilyn Gardner, U.S. Navy Vice Admiral Douglas Gordon Perry, IDVA Director Terry Prince, and Governor JB Pritzker present the Navy Week proclamation.*





# Field Services



Matthew Taylor partnered with the Boone County VAC at the Boone County Fair. (left to right), Tyler Davis, Matthew Taylor, Larry Bowes, Noah and Shelby Carlsson.



Veteran Service Officer Debbie Fuehrer with Rick Kolk from the Rockford Vet Center at the Boone County Fair.



During a visit to Machesney Park and Rockford, Melissa Beckford, Northern Region Supervisor, and Mark Patterson, Field Services Manager, stopped by the Boone County Fair to say hello and thank the Boone County Veterans Assistance Commission staff. Mark rang their bell "to honor our heroes."



Veteran Service Officer Michele Richards participated in the Christmas in July Event, located at 115th and Halsted in Chicago.



IDVA Director Terry Prince and Veteran Service Officer Michele Richards participated in the Armed Forces Summer Bash Resource Event.



Veteran Service Officer Gerald Enriquez and VFW Assistant Department Service Officer Charles Johnson attended the Post 311 Benefits Session in Richton Park.



Veteran Service Officer Tanya Reyes participated in the Naperville Veterans Business Fair

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.**