



VETERANS CONNECTIONS

News from the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs ★ Volume 5, Issue 4 ★ April 2025



★ Message from IDVA Director Terry Prince

IDVA presented its budget to the House and Senate Health and Human Services Appropriation Committees in April, which is critical for the future of its next fiscal year. Our fiscal team assesses every part of IDVA to reveal how we can be more efficient and effective. The numbers were crunched until we landed on a budget that ensures we are serving veterans at the highest level. IDVA serves five functions: managing its five Veterans' Homes, deploying Veterans Service Officers across the state, executing the State Approving Agency for education, administering Veterans Cash Grants, and

providing programming and events. The budget considers these areas and allocates funding to support all efforts. IDVA continues to hire Veteran Service Officers, medical professionals and staff in the Veterans' Homes, and support staff in the Central Office. When we presented this budget to the House and Senate committees, the legislators asked important questions, representing their interest in Illinois veterans. We are confident that this budget will be passed and IDVA's services will be seamless and expansive. You will learn more in this edition's News from the Capitol.

Also, the IDVA Leadership Team gathered for its quarterly two-day meetings at the Veterans' Home at Quincy to tour the new domiciliary and long-term care building. The domiciliary opened in January, and we look forward to the long-term care building welcoming residents very soon. The excitement among the veterans and the staff is evident! If long-term care is in your future or a veteran in your life, visit: <https://veterans.illinois.gov/services-benefits/homes/homes.html>.

This edition highlights the first two of the 25 women veteran leaders honored in March, legislative initiatives, field services activities, and hiring at IDVA.

As always, thank you for staying connected to IDVA.

Sincerely,

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

IDVA's legislative team monitors and advocates for legislation to benefit veterans. Please read on to learn about these relevant initiatives.

Budget Update

Thursday, April 9th, 2025: IDVA presented the budget to the Senate Health and Human Services (HHS) Appropriations Committee. This was IDVA's second budget hearing for spring 2025, following the House HHS Appropriations Budget Hearing. IDVA's Director, Chief of Staff, and Chief Fiscal Officer testified for and requested \$234.5 million for FY26, a \$3 million reduction from FY25. This reduction will not impact veterans' services, but speaks directly to the agency's efficiency, fiscal responsibility, and the application of federal per diem to offset operating costs. Members of the committee asked IDVA about hiring frontline healthcare workers, the overlap between the agency and veterans assistance commissions, and federal budget pressures.

Legislative Updates

[HB2547](#): This bill passed out of the first chamber and arrived in the Senate on April 14th, 2025. This technical bill aligns with the rebranding of IDVA, modifying the agency's name to the "Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs", formerly "Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs."

[HB2572](#): This bill passed out of the first chamber and arrived in the Senate on April 9th, 2025. HB 2572 provides that the IDVA shall determine the eligibility of persons who apply for a Deceased, Disabled, and MIA/POW Veterans' Dependents Scholarship (a post-secondary education program) or a Deceased, Disabled, and MIA/POW Veterans' Dependents Educational Opportunity Grant Act by rule.

[HB2777](#): This bill passed out of the first chamber and arrived in the Senate on April 10th, 2025. HB 2777 provides that an employee who is also a veteran shall be permitted four (4) days per year to receive medical care authorized by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, at any health care provider or health care facility (rather than permitted four (4) days per year to visit a veterans hospital or clinic), for examination or treatment (rather than for examination) of a military service-connected condition (rather than service-connected disability).

Other bills related to service members and veterans that are making their way through the legislative process include [HB1352](#), [HB1362](#), [SB32](#), and [SB1675](#).

Legislative Events

On Monday, April 7th, IDVA's Legislative Director participated in Leader Lilly's HHS Listening Session in the 78th House district in Oak Park, IL. Multiple health and human services (HHS) organizations attended to discuss their services, budget pressures,



Left to right: IDVA's Legislative Director Sara Augustinas, Chief of Staff Jassen Strokosch, and Legislative Liaison Dylan Hopp advocate for Illinois veterans at the Capitol in Springfield.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ IDVA Is Hiring

Join Us in Serving Those Who Served

IDVA offers a wide range of opportunities for people motivated to serve those who served. In its five residential Veterans' Homes, positions include VNACs, nurses, activities professionals, dietitians, cooks, engineers, physical therapists, and more. Veteran Service Officer positions are available across the state. Central Office hires human resource and fiscal professionals and other support staff. The State of Illinois offers extraordinary benefits, including schedule options. To learn more about positions available, [click here](#). Attend one of IDVA's virtual job fairs to learn more about the hiring process and important job search and interview skills.

★ Serve those who served ★

Join IDVA for a series of virtual job fairs to learn more about becoming part of Team IDVA

Date	Time	HFS Virtual	Event Registration
5/1/2025	12:00-12:45 P.M.	How to Certify Your Veterans Points	
5/8/2025	2:00-2:45 P.M.	IDVA Extraordinary Employees	
5/9/2025	12:00-12:45 P.M.	Creating a Profile	
5/12/2025	10:00-10:45 A.M.	How to Read a Job Bulletin	
5/13/2025	10:00-10:45 A.M.	Interview Tips and Tricks	
5/13/2025	5:30-6:15 P.M.	Creating a Profile	
5/14/2025	10:00-10:45 A.M.	IDVA Extraordinary Employees	
5/19/2025	5:30-6:15 P.M.	Interview Tips and Tricks	
5/20/2025	10:00-10:45 A.M.	How to Certify Your Veterans Points	
5/30/2025	2:00-2:45 P.M.	How to Read a Job Bulletin	

ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Women Veterans Program

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs Women Veterans Program will continue to celebrate its 25 Illinois Women Veterans Leaders of 2025, honored at the first annual luncheon held on March 31, 2025. IDVA, in partnership with the USDVA, received nominations from women veterans who demonstrated extraordinary leadership and support to the veteran community.



First Row: Karen Hernandez, Jill Henry, Amanda Depew, Lisa Mannion, Rosemary E. Connolly, Renee Dickerson, Milana Herman, Denisse Montoya, Alejandra Hernandez, Evamarie Duff, Treazure Owens, Kimberly Yantis, Angela St. Paul, Margo Watson; Second Row: Laura Doss, IDVA Director Terry Prince, Cassandra Taylor, Yvette Jones-Swanson, Tyra Oliver, Representative Stephanie Kifowit, Nekohl Johnson, Vernessa L. Henderson. Not pictured: Tamala Anderson, Ashtin Bader, Senator Tammy Duckworth, Elisabeth Pennix, Elizabeth D. Soto, Ashley Tuburan, Angela Walker.

25 Illinois Women Veteran Leaders of 2025



Alejandra Hernandez

Alejandra is a distinguished Marine Corps veteran whose remarkable leadership and unwavering commitment to the veteran communities have left an indelible mark on countless lives. Alejandra has successfully created awareness around the unique challenges women and LGBTQIA+ veterans face. Alejandra advocated to the clinical leadership at The Road Home Program, where she has worked since

2022, to create a "specialty cohort" for LGBTQIA+ veterans, which will take place in June 2025.

Alejandra Hernandez served in the United States Marine Corps for four years as a Food Service Specialist with Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune Headquarters. She was stationed at the Marine Support Squadron 272 Marine Corps Air Station New River, NC, and was deployed in 2007 to Kuwait, Camp Al Asad, and Camp TQ Air Base. After her time in service, Alejandra attended Waubesa Community College. She later received a bachelor's degree in Sociology from the University of Illinois Chicago.

She is a member and secretary of the American Veterans for Equal Rights Chapter in Chicago and the Women Marines Association President, IL-4 MAJGEN Angela Salinas Chapter.



25 Illinois Women Veteran Leaders of 2025



Amanda Depew

Amanda Depew served in the United States Air Force during Enduring Freedom (2004-2005) as a Munitions System Apprentice. Her military experience showed her passion for veteran advocacy and led her to focus on suicide prevention, mental health awareness, and increasing access to vital services for veterans and their families.

Amanda is a licensed clinical social worker and the Southern Region Outreach, Education, and Community Engagement Specialist for Illinois Joining Forces. She is committed to bridging the gap between veterans and essential resources and ensuring they receive the support they deserve.

Amanda is also an active member of VFW Post 1739 in Belleville and American Legion Post 199 in Edwardsville, demonstrating her commitment to veteran service organizations and community engagement.



The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs and National Service Organization
(Veterans of Foreign Wars/VFW) Illinois representatives will be hosting a

Veterans Claims Workshop

Thursday, May 1, 2025

9:00 AM - 3:00 PM

VA Medical Center

1900 East Main Street, Danville, IL
Veterans Resource Building 104

Meet representatives from the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, VA Illiana Social Work Team (Community Outreach), and the Salvation Army Community Outreach team.

To book a meeting with IDVA VSO visit:

Diane Moncrief: [Book time with Moncrief, Diane: Claims Workshop](#)

Michele Hansen-Hoback: [Book time with Hansen-Hoback, Michele: Claims Workshop](#)

Learn more about important veterans' benefits and services

0900-1030 VA Disability Compensation

1030-1100 VA Veteran's Pension

1100-1130 IL Disabled Veterans' Benefit Brief

Break

1300-1330 Survivor's Benefits

1330-1500 Individual assistance (by appointment)

Hunting and Fishing Licenses available for eligible veterans



Field Services Fab Five

Field Services manages approximately 5,000 claims annually, bringing veterans in Illinois approximately \$570 million in benefits and services. This success is because of the talent, knowledge, and skills of a team that is continuously learning. No stone goes unturned until a veteran crosses the finish line with a claim or appeal. The Field Services Managers and Region Supervisors attended the quarterly Executive Leadership Meeting at the Veterans' Home at Quincy. The gathering included a visit to the Home's War Museum.



Pictured from left to right: Southern Region Supervisor Jeffrey Lewis, Northern Region Supervisor Melissa Beckford, Field Services Manager Mark Patterson, Central Region Supervisor Kimberly Yantis, and Metro Region Supervisor Robert Iverson III.



Veteran Service Officer Frank Delatorre, IL State Representative Rita Mayfield, and Retired U.S. Navy Chief Petty Officer Maurice Edwards participate in the College of Lake County Job Fair.



Veteran Service Officer Jeff Eagler attended the Veterans Recognition of Central Illinois Annual Vietnam Event at the Decatur Civic Center. This event recognizes Vietnam Veterans every year, and included music, food, displays, and veteran service groups.



Veteran Service Officer Shynae Murphy attends the Veteran Resource Fair at the Berwyn Masonic Lodge No. 839.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Quilts of Valor



Veteran Service Officer and U.S. Navy Veteran Carla Waibel was presented with a Quilt of Valor at the 22nd annual Quilts of Valor Ceremony at the Quad Cities Botanical Center. The handmade quilts are awarded to veterans as a symbol of gratitude and respect for their service. Founded in 2003 by Catherine Roberts, Quilts of Valor has presented over 400,000 quilts to veterans across the nation. Its mission is, "to cover Service Members and Veterans touched by war with comforting and healing Quilts of Valor."

Carla served from 1995-2000 in Okinawa, Japan, Camp Futenma and the Naval Hospital, Great Lakes. She joined IDVA in 2016 and serves the Rock Island veteran community.

Carla's late uncle, also a U.S. Navy veteran, William Wills, was awarded a quilt just before his passing in December 2024.

To learn more about Quilts of Valor, visit: [Home - Quilts of Valor Foundation](#)

"Thank you for your service, sacrifice, and valor in serving our nation." -Quilts of Valor

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Veterans' Homes

Hanging out with friends at the Veterans' Home at Chicago's Spring Mock-Tail Party.



Left to right: U.S. Army veteran John Ridenour and U.S. Navy veteran Steve Dyer shoot some pool.

Volunteer Week

The volunteers in Illinois' five Veterans' Homes in Anna, Chicago, LaSalle, Manteno, and Quincy amplify the services provided to veterans in our care. With their time and support, the Homes provide programming, host events, and transport veterans to appointments and gatherings. Their energy and work amplify the daily lives of veterans. The opportunities are countless, including:

- In-house Transportation (church services, activities, barber/beauty appointments)
- Crafts (woodworking/weaving, knitting)
- Gardening
- Fishing
- Music (instrument/singing)
- Parties (holiday/seasonal/birthday)
- Events (remembrance days, parties, etc.)
- Games (cards/board games/bingo)
- Coffee and meal visits
- Walks
- Assisting with incoming donations

To learn more about volunteering at a Veterans' Home and/ or to apply, [click here](#).

During volunteer week, April 20-26, we celebrated the many dedicated and fantastic volunteers.

Veterans' Home at LaSalle



Volunteer, Pam Booras, with therapy dog German Shepherd -Vera.



Constellation Energy Corporation's volunteer group cleaning up leaves in the courtyard.



Volunteer Marion Thompson photographed making poppies.

Veterans' Home at Manteno



Volunteers Janis Cadieux and Sandy Britt are enjoying musical entertainment and dancing with U.S. Army veteran LeRoy Schweitzer.



Volunteer Mike Barrows with U.S. Navy veteran Carl Fosnaugh in the Wood Shop.



Volunteer Mike Barrows with U.S. Navy veteran Carl Fosnaugh in the Wood Shop.

Veterans' Home at Quincy



Donna Williamson, Mary Jarvis, and Tom Boden volunteer to make fresh popcorn every week, which is distributed around campus for the enjoyment of residents. The popcorn is delicious and a treat for everyone. Not pictured: Mike and Kathy Fitzgerald.



U.S. Army veteran Denny Beeler (seated) with volunteer and U.S. Army veteran Jim Chaney (Domiciliary resident) and volunteer Carolyn Kling at the Welcome Corner. The Welcome Corner is a "free" thrift shop for residents.



U.S. Army veteran and Domiciliary resident Rich Fisher works with volunteer and Master Gardener Cathy Shanks to keep the Memorial Garden looking beautiful in every season.

Veterans' Home at Anna



Jayson Holland



Ms. Jennie Bridgeman



Volunteer Jennifer Dagg with Claire, an amputee, learning to use her walker.

Veterans' Home at Chicago



Peggy Starczowski playing Backgammon with Marine Veteran Arnold Aront



Eleanore Skopek smiling with U.S. Army veteran Edward Kulesza with his Birthday crown.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Purple Up Day

April is the Month of the Military Child. Over 1.6 million children of our military service members support, sacrifice, and give to our nation. Families typically move two to three times a year, meaning children are leaving their schools, friends, and communities. They are resilient and strong, and they sacrifice so much. IDVA is grateful for their service and showed our support by wearing purple on Purple Up Day on April 15th.



Veterans' Home at Anna: Front Row: Shelly Miller, Kristi Fombelle, Amy Keistler, Cindy Rushing, Tammy Graves, Lori Godwin, Sue Randolph.
Back Row: Anna Aumiller, Layla Bays, Kathryn Hiatt, Emily Sherwood, Denise Goins, Bonnie Brimm, Tammy Wieseman



Central Office: Front row: Mark Patterson, Patty Wills, Carla Rapps, Brittany Hawkins, Sean Miller, Bradley Bell, Kimberly Yantis, Ann Holladay.
Middle row: Stephanie Heckenkamp, Riley McKneelen, Shannon Shymansky, Justin Buchanan, Jenny Franklin, Danielle Sunley, Daniel Brown, Carlos English. Back row: Danielle Luevano, Bill Hunt, James Bakunas, Chris Wieneke, Allen Shelley, Crystal Womack.



Metro Region Supervisor:
Robert Iverson III



Chicago Central Office: Left to Right: Dylon Hopp, Russell Needler, Matt Eddington, Candice Rudd, Robin Webster, Cynthia McKee, Director Terry Prince, Front row: Sara Augustinas, Maureen Hartigan.



Veterans' Home at Quincy: Left to right: Chuck Newton, Jessica Williams, Hannah Ajdinovich, Amanda Bunch, Kerrie Hilgenbrinck (kneeling), Andrew Juette, Carla Trautvetter, Bridgette Randall, Tracy Brown, Valerie Peterson, Zach Grattan, Kasaundra Morelock, Dannell Tullock, Tim Kane

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Administrative Professionals Day

IDVA's administrative professionals are the agency's backbone in delivering services to veterans effectively and efficiently. Their organization, resourcefulness, and skills support the Homes, Veteran Service Officers, and Central Office. We expressed our gratitude on April 23rd, Administrative Professionals Day, and recognize their contributions each day of the year.



Veterans' Home at Quincy: Left to right: Sarah Deege, Bobbi Mock, Jessica Perrine, Sierra Burcham, Andrew Juette, Danell Tullock, Tina Powell, Kasaundra Morelock, Sandy Leasman, Sandy Heaton, Tim Kane, Kayla Crabtree, Tracy Brown, Kim Niekamp, Jessica Williams, Zach Grattan



*Veterans' Home at Manteno:
RoseAnn Winkel and Administrator Tanya Smith.*



*Veterans' Home at Quincy:
Carla Trautvetter and Administrator Chuck Newton.*



*Central Office:
Executive Assistant Jennifer Franklin and Director Terry Prince.*



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 involving any member of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, please let us know.

Email us at

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.



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