

VETERANS CONNECTIONS

News from the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs ★ Volume 3, Issue 4 ★ July 2023



★ Message from IDVA Director Terry Prince

We are mid-way through summer, and we have experienced major weather incidents across the state. Springfield residents have struggled with wind that brought the earth into the sky and storms crashing through neighborhoods, both causing major destruction and injury. Chicago had recent rains that flooded communities and sirens alerted of an impending tornado. I heard that Taylor Swift, who alerted concert goers just hours earlier that she needed to start early to avoid a torrential rainstorm, thanked thousands of people for showing up early – those Swifties will do anything for a great, upbeat concert. Simply said, we cannot control the weather. However, we can prepare for it like all things in life. At IDVA, we continuously prepare for the unexpected changes in legislation and national and global events that directly impact Veterans. We talk with our partners, listen to Veterans, and keep our eyes on the news. We strive to keep on top of things and welcome any information you feel is relevant.

Our outreach is at full throttle with Veteran Service Officers (VSO) out in the community reaching Veterans where they are – county and state fairs, picnics, events, and other celebrations. This is one of the ways we connect with Veterans. Each story is unique and hearing them first-hand equips us to help Veterans achieve their goals, get their questions answered, and obtain their earned benefits. Our VSOs are eager to help, so please find your local VSO to help guide you and uncover your earned benefits. You can locate the closest IDVA VSO at our website: <https://veterans.illinois.gov/serviceoffices.html> or by calling us at 1-800-437-9824.

There is one date I would really like you to be aware of, August 9, 2023. Veterans are encouraged to file a claim – or submit their intent to file a claim – For PACT Act-related benefits now. Veterans who do so by August 9th, 2023, may have their benefits, if granted, backdated to August 10, 2022, the day President Biden signed the bill into law.

We've also included information on the Springfield State Fair coming up on August 13, 2023. We hope you will join us for a day where we have amped up the entertainment to celebrate the military service of Illinois' Veterans and their families. The Veteran Benefit Expo runs all day and is an opportunity to learn about the resources available to Veterans. Don't forget, a similar program is also happening at the DuQuoin State Fair on August 27, 2023. Be sure to come out and connect with your fellow Veterans for some fun, fellowship and information.

Enjoy your summer and as always, thank you for staying connected to IDVA.

Sincerely, **Terry Prince**, IDVA Director

State Fair

Veterans and Gold Star Families Day at the 2023 Illinois State Fair

Free admission for veterans and immediate family on Sunday, August 13

The Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs (IDVA), the Illinois Department of Agriculture, and the Illinois State Fair invite veterans and their family members to enjoy a free day at the Illinois State Fair on Sunday, August 13, 2023. This annual event offers exciting events, programs, and music. It concludes with a parade led by state officials and IDVA Assistant Director Anthony Vaughn, along with veterans' organizations, JROTC teams, and IDVA staff.



This year's theme is "No One Fights Alone."

Veterans and their families can show any form of military ID for free admission. Parking is not included.

The schedule of events is as follows:

10:00 a.m.	JROTC competition begins
10:00 a.m.- 3:00 p.m.	Veteran Benefit Expo: The Shed
11:00 a.m.	Main Program
11:30 a.m. - 2:45 p.m.	Entertainment: Lincoln Stage
3:00 p.m.	JROTC Award Ceremony
4:00 p.m.	Veteran Parade: Grandstand Avenue

The Benefits Exposition includes information about benefits, services and activities for veterans and their family members from the IDVA, state and federal agencies, veteran service organizations and non-profits.

The JROTC drill teams will be awarded first, second, and third place prizes with a monetary gift and plaque provided by the service organizations.

Come join us!

Field Services

PACT ACT

WHY YOU SHOULD FILE YOUR CLAIM BY AUGUST 9TH!

Important information on PACT Act claims

While there is no deadline for filing ACT claims, claims processed by August 9, 2023 are backdated to August 10, 2022, the day the bill was signed into law - resulting in a greater benefit to the Veteran. An intent to file or a completed claim must be filed with the VA prior to August 9, 2023. The VA will consider claims filed after August 9, 2023 as the date of the filing.

The VA will continue to consider claims filed after August 9, 2023.

For assistance in filing a claim, you can contact the following:

- **Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs: 800 437-9824 or 217 782-6641**
We can assist you in setting up an appointment with one of our Veteran Service Officers to assist you in filing a claim or intent to file. All our services are provided free of charge. or
- **Veteran Service Office locator.** The following link will provide you with the closest IDVA Veteran Service Officer to your area. [field-offices.pdf \(illinois.gov\)](https://www.idva.gov/field-offices.pdf) or
- **Contact VA helpline at 800 827-1000.** They can answer general questions and assist with establishing an intent to file.



Jeffrey Lewis, Southern Region Supervisor

Jeffrey Lewis accepted the position of Southern Region Supervisor. Jeff has been a Veterans Service Officer with the agency since 2005 and has demonstrated his commitment and persistence to serving Veterans. He is a talented veteran advocate and

has already proven himself to be an excellent leader, supporter, and mentor in the Southern Region. He has also been a valued contributor to the leadership team.

Field Services

The Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs is hiring Veteran Service Officers

IDVA is recruiting combat-era Veterans eager to help Veterans, retirees, spouses, and dependents obtain their earned federal and state benefits and services.

In this role, the VSO will:

- Work one-on-one with Veterans to identify the benefits and services that will help them achieve their goals including employment, education, housing, and healthcare.
- Partner with county, state, and federal agencies to ensure Veterans have access to all available benefits and resources.
- Represent IDVA at community events to educate Veterans about IDVA and how it is poised to serve them.
- Receive comprehensive training.
- Be part of a community of Veteran Service Officers dedicated to supporting, advocating, and serving Illinois' 600,000 Veterans.

Minimum requirements:

- Knowledge and skill equivalent to two years of college with emphasis in business administration or public administration.
- One year of experience in sales, public relations, welfare work, or other customer service roles.

Preferred qualifications:

- Extensive knowledge of IDVA's Veterans' programs and the operating policies and procedures.
- Extensive knowledge of the benefits and services available to Veterans, their spouses and family, and the federal and state laws and regulations governing their administration.
- Working knowledge of office management skills and techniques.
- One year of experience managing an office efficiently and effectively, to provide services to military personnel, Veterans, their dependents and/or survivors, and to maintain records as required by the agency or organization.
- One year of experience establishing and maintaining effective working relationships with other staff, Veterans, dependents, community organization, and other stakeholders in the Veteran community.
- One year of experience preparing and presenting topical speeches to Veterans' groups and other interested parties.
- One year of experience explaining federal and state veterans' legislation to the public.
- One year of experience analyzing and interpreting service records, private medical records, and reports in terms of establishing entitlement to Veteran's Administration benefits.
- One year of experience examining, interpreting and explaining complex decisions affecting clientele regarding claims issues, and appropriately advising them of their responsibility in relation to benefit awards.
- One year of experience making informed decisions in accordance with the laws of the federal and state government governing Veterans' benefits and services and expressing related ideas clearly in written and/or oral form.

For more information and to apply:



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Meet Robert Iverson III, Metro Region Supervisor

Robert is an Iraqi Veteran having spent 23 years in the Army and the Air National Guards. He has been with IDVA for 17 ½ years, 10 years as VSO and 7 ½ as Metro Region Supervisor.

On serving Veterans: "I like getting up every morning not knowing exactly who I will be assisting that day. It's very exciting. I enjoy having a positive impact on a Veteran's life."

For more information and to apply:



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Meet Shynae Murphy, VSO Metro Region

Shynae Murphy served in the United States Navy from 2006-2010 aboard the USS John C. Stennis. She was an Aviation Maintenance Administration (AZ) tasked with managing Naval aircraft maintenance to keep aircraft and aviation equipment in top working order.

She has been a Veterans' Service Officer (VSO) for six years. She began her career on the appeals team, taking veterans' and dependents' cases to the Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA). As a rookie, she was scared but showed no fear because of her love of advocating for Veterans and their dependents. She later moved to the Metro Division.

On serving Veterans: "Being a VSO has taught me patience and empathy. I love helping Veterans fight for their justice."

For more information and to apply:



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Meet Mark Patterson, Field Services Manager

Mark retired from military service March 2015 after 28 years with the Army, Army Reserve and Army National Guard, attaining the rank of Chief Warrant Officer 3. He participated in Desert Shield/Desert Storm, December 1990 through May 1991, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Tikrit, Iraq, March 2003 through April 2004 and Operation Enduring Freedom, Paktia Province, Afghanistan, November 2008 through August 2009. December 2022 marked his 30th year with IDVA. He was a Veterans Service Officer for 19 years and has been the Field Services Manager since December 2020.

On serving Veterans: "As a VSO, you navigate, coordinate, and strategize the path to obtaining the Veterans earned benefits and services that can be life changing. Although some benefits take time, it is not an abstract process. There are few things more rewarding than after working together and building a relationship with a fellow Veteran who receives his or her earned benefits. Having a role in making this happen is incredible."

For more information and to apply:



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Meet Josh Layton, VSO, Effingham

Josh served 10 years active duty in the Marines and currently serves in the Marine Corps Reserves out of Ft. Sheridan, IL. Josh has been deployed multiple times in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. Josh's duty stations include Okinawa, Japan, Beaufort, S.C, Camp Lejeune, NC and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Josh Serves as the Veteran Service Officer in Effingham, IL and surrounding counties. Josh started his employment for the IDVA in September 2018 after attending College at Eastern Illinois University.

On serving Veterans: "I am passionate about serving the Veteran community and families, and I am extremely dedicated to assisting Veteran's in navigating the complex web of the VA and benefits. I get paid by the state, but I work for the Vets."

For more information and to apply:



Three Steps to Success in the Use of State and Federal Veterans Education Benefits

At a recent conference of veterans' representatives on college campuses, both seasoned and new veterans' representatives communicated that many military service members and veterans do not understand how to access their veteran education benefits, such as the GI Bill®. Many stated military service members and veterans believe they are automatically eligible for benefits when discharged and just need to show up at a university and college to start using their earned benefits. While the process is not that simple, here are three simple steps to begin collecting veterans' education benefits.

1. Military Service Members and Veterans Must Apply for Benefits

In no case are military service members and veterans automatically eligible for education benefits. In fact, in all cases, when a military service member or veteran plans on using a state education benefit, such as the Illinois Veterans Grant, or a federal benefit like the GI Bill, they must apply for the benefit. While each program has different eligibility criteria, most are seeking the same basic information about the veteran or military service member. Moreover, most veteran education benefit programs have an online application process. When sitting down to complete the application process, veterans and military service members must ensure they have enough time to complete the application, generally 30 minutes, and should be prepared to upload basic documents, such as discharge paperwork at a minimum. The federal application process may also require the applicant to sign up for a multi-factor authentication system, such as ID.ME or Login.gov.

One may access the online application process for the Illinois Veterans Grant or Illinois National Guard Grant by going to <https://studentportal.isac.org/student>. The Illinois Veterans Grant is a one-time application, while the Illinois National Guard Grant requires an annual application.

Moreover, one may apply for the federal GI Bill program by going to <https://www.va.gov/education/how-to-apply/>.

If an applicant has a question about the online application process, they may contact either the federal or state agency that administers the program, or they may contact an Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Service Officer at <https://veterans.illinois.gov/serviceoffices.html>.

In those cases where the state or federal agency requests additional information pertaining to an application, or determine that an applicant is not eligible, the applicant may also contact an Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Service Officer at <https://veterans.illinois.gov/serviceoffices.html> for further assistance in developing the claim.

2. Provide Copy of Certificate of Eligibility to Veterans Representative at Education or Training Program

Once a veteran or military service member completes the online application process for either a state or federal benefit, if eligible, the applicant will receive a certificate of eligibility. The military service member or veteran must provide a copy of this certificate of eligibility to the veterans' representative or school certifying official at the education or training program in which they intend to enroll.

3. Request Veterans Representative Certify Enrollment for Veterans Benefits

Whether it is a federal or state benefit, veterans' representatives must report the enrollment of military service members and veterans to the applicable governmental agency for each term enrolled. This report will result in benefits being paid out to the school or veteran as applicable. Without this report, neither the education or training program, nor the veteran or military service member, will receive any benefits. Therefore, military service members and veterans must request for each term of enrollment, that the veterans representative report their enrollment to the appropriate state or federal agency. This request may also require the military service member or veteran to complete internal paperwork at the university or community college to request the school certify enrollment. Some schools require a military service member or veteran to complete this paperwork each term, others only once. Military service members and veterans must have a firm understanding of the requirements of

Education

the education and training program in which they are enrolled.

As the Fall 2023 term approaches on campuses across Illinois, it is not too late to start this process, nor is it too late to let other military service members or veterans know about the process. Between state and federal benefits, Illinois veterans are provided with many opportunities to reach their education and training goals. To use these benefits, however, Illinois military

service members and veterans must use the three-steps outlined in this article to guarantee that their education benefits may be used and acquired without issue. In the end, use these benefits, and attain all your education and training goals.

® 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 <https://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill>.

Chicago Brigade Announces New Program

This information was released by the Chicago Brigade



Chicago Brigade is offering a new program designed exclusively for student veterans in Chicago: The Five-Week Experience. This exceptional pathway brings together the finest resources for student veterans in Chicago and combines them with real-world opportunities for success. Over the course of five consecutive Saturdays in Chicago, participants will embark on a transformative journey through five distinct courses, covering a comprehensive curriculum that encompasses essential skills and knowledge. Each class will be delivered by a corporate leader from the Chicagoland area. With a different location each week, these premier venues provide an ideal setting for networking with industry professionals.

The Chicago Brigade Five-Week Experience serves as a springboard for student veterans' professional aspirations, equipping them with the confidence and competence to excel in their chosen fields. Those who participate in our program will receive extensive professional development, complimentary headshots, inclusion in our alumni database, and one guaranteed ticket to our exclusive networking social.

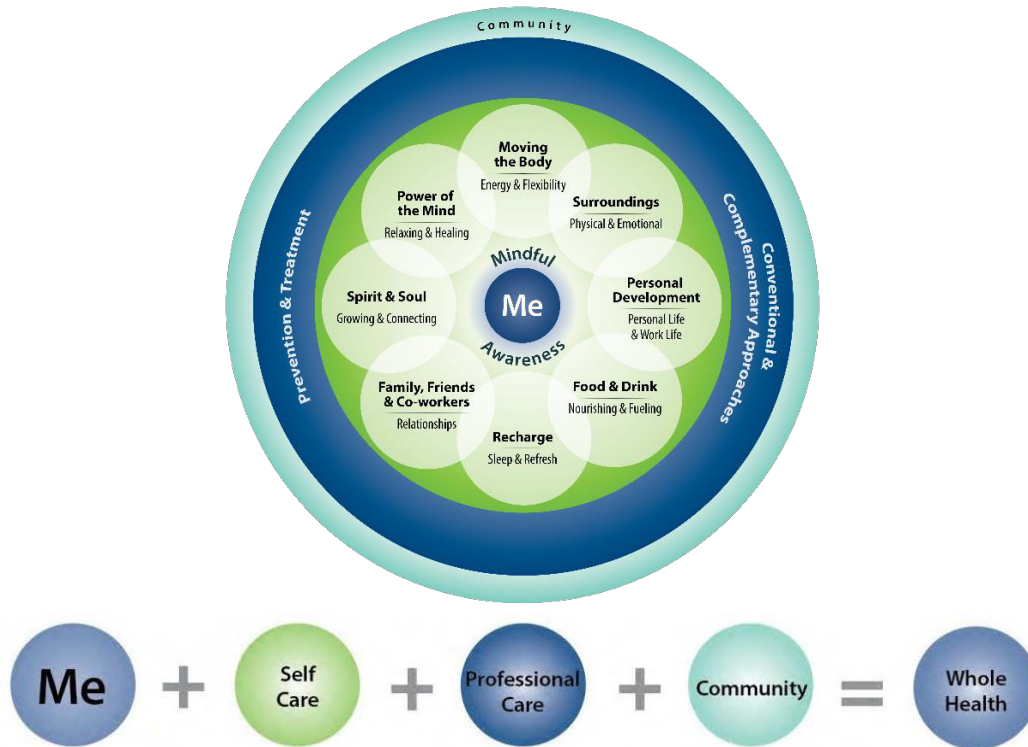
This program is entirely cost-free and represents an unparalleled opportunity for advancement across various industries. There is simply nothing else like it in Chicago, and we are thrilled to share this extraordinary experience with our student veterans.

Please note that space in this program is limited to 30 student veterans, so early registration is strongly encouraged! The registration period is open from June 20th to August 1st. Student veterans will be selected for the program based on a comprehensive survey questionnaire. Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis, so we urge you to submit your application as soon as possible! We anticipate a high demand for this program, so don't miss out on this incredible opportunity.

Chicago Brigade is a local non-profit organization founded by student veterans from colleges around Chicago. Their goal is to establish and maintain unified camaraderie, professional development, and networking opportunities for the community of student veterans in Chicagoland.

WHOLE HEALTH: INFORMATION FOR VETERANS

Get Moving: Adding Physical Activity into Your Routine



Whole Health is an approach to health care that empowers and enables YOU to take charge of your health and well-being and live your life to the fullest. It starts with YOU. It is fueled by the power of knowing yourself and what will really work for you in your life. Once you have some ideas about this, your team can help you with the skills, support, and follow up you need to reach your goals.

All resources provided in these handouts are reviewed by VHA clinicians and Veterans. No endorsement of any specific products is intended. Best wishes!

<https://www.va.gov/wholehealth/>



Make an Illinois Veterans' Home Your Home

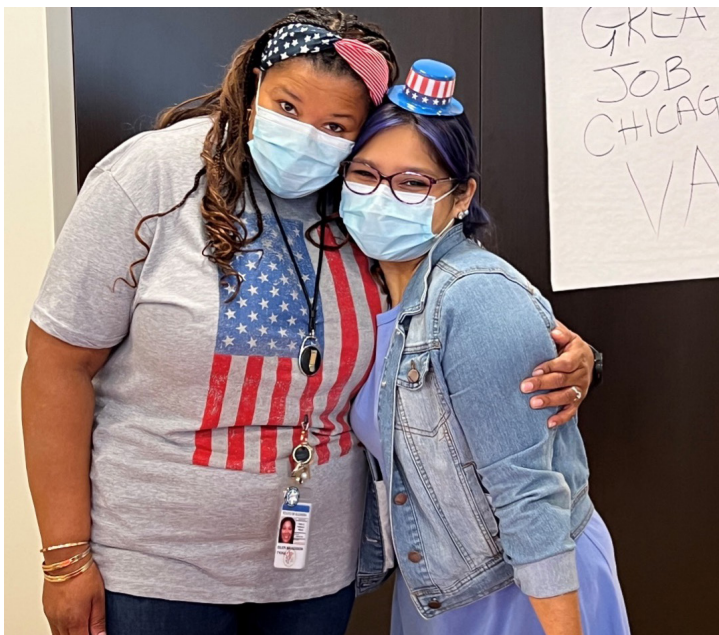
The Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs offers five residential homes across the state – Anna, Chicago, LaSalle, Manteno, and Quincy. Each one is unique in its setting and united in the professional, compassionate care they provide. Illinois has offered care to Veterans since the Quincy home was built in 1885, and since then, thousands of Veterans have chosen these homes to live. As part of a Veterans' earned benefits, the monthly cost of living at a Veterans' Home is \$1,659 (as of publication), far less than comparable non-profit or for-profit homes around the state.

The medical professionals, staff, and volunteers have created close communities where the medical, personal, and emotional needs of the Veteran are central to their care. Planned activities promote connection between the Veterans, staff, and volunteers and provide enjoyable recreation tailored to the interests of the Veterans. Beautiful outdoor spaces are settings for visiting, reading, and special events. Carefully crafted meals promote good health and companionship. State-of-the-art rehabilitation facilities and trained professionals elevate levels of independence. Religious services are offered to fortify the Veterans' spirit. The homes care for the whole person and continue to learn about new treatments, programs, and technologies that might benefit the Veteran.

A Veteran Home is designed specifically for Veterans and recognizes their service in everything it does including the setting, décor, care, and events. The staff are dedicated to honoring Veterans by providing the highest-level of care and creating a supportive community. Veterans are uniquely bonded, and living together creates a fellowship that is shared each day.

"Two and a half years ago, after my wife researched homes across the state, we picked the Illinois Veterans' Home at Quincy. Those of us who are veterans, it was a relief how much lower the cost was than other nursing homes. Since I've been here, everyone in therapy, dental, eye, x-ray, nursing, and activities have been extra kind. I am very glad this is the home I chose." Mr. James Kampe, IVHQ resident and president of the Resident Advisory Group.

Complete eligibility and application process, can be found on the IDVA website: <https://veterans.illinois.gov/services-benefits/homes/homes.html>. Individual home information is also provided on the website for specific questions.



July 4th at the Veterans' Home at Chicago featuring food, music, and entertainment.



Civil War Soldier Ceremony at the Veteran's Home at Quincy

Private William M. Prater, the last Civil War Veteran buried in Adams County, was recognized by the Last Soldier Project of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War Gen. George A. McClern and Camp No. 4 of Springfield. The ceremony took place at his Sunset Cemetery gravesite on the property of the Veterans' Home at Quincy. The project was established to honor the last Civil War veteran buried in each county.

"Coming together to honor Private Prater's service and contribution to the underpinnings of our nation keeps us grounded in the history of our nation," said Director Prince. "We are grateful to the Last Soldier Project for recognizing those who served in the Civil War and for joining on the Sunset Cemetery sacred ground."

Private Prater, a former resident of the Home, was the last of the 15,000 Civil War Veterans who lived at the Soldiers and Sailors Home. He was born June 15, 1844, in Kentucky and moved to Illinois at a young age. He served in the Civil War twice. He enlisted in 1862 at the age of 18 and served in the 69th Illinois Infantry and again in 1865 in the 14th Illinois Calvary. Private Prater participated in the battles of Lookout Mountain, the battle of Knoxville, and was involved in facing Confederate General John Hunt Morgan in his raid through Indiana and Ohio. He was captured in Georgia and spent seven months in Andersonville



(L-R) Richard Jones, SUVCW Camp #4 Brother, "General Grant"—Camp #4 Senior Vice Commander Larry Werline, Director Terry Prince and Camp#4 Commander Joseph Kessler.

Prison. In 1914, Private Prater and his wife moved into the Veterans' Home. He celebrated his 100th birthday at the home in June 1944.

The ceremony included a recount of Private Prater's career and life, wreath laying, and a 21-gun salute. Research began last fall to uncover the last Civil War veteran in Adams County. Assistance from the Historical Society of Quincy and Adams County led to Private Prater.



Veterans' Home at Chicago's Inaugural Walking Club

Pictured from left to right: Ron Cercello (US Marine Corps), George Henderson (US Army), Cliff Hopper (US Navy), John Ridenour (US Army), Arnold Arondt (US Marine Corps), Bob Bierwirth(US Army), and Rudy Gerent (Army).

"All Gave Some, Some Gave All"



8TH ANNUAL PURPLE HEART DAY CEREMONY

The Hayes/Krell Memorial Chapter 159
of the
Military Order of the Purple Heart
cordially invite you
to the Purple Heart Day Ceremony

Saturday, August 5, 2023
10:00 a.m.

Oak Ridge Cemetery
Purple Heart Memorial

We hope you can join us to honor those who were wounded or
made the ultimate sacrifice for our country and freedom.

Seating is available

"Freedom is Never Free"

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

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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