

Illinois Veterans Advisory Council

Annual Report 2026





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★ Letter from the Director



The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) continues to expand its services to all veterans who call Illinois home and strives to provide exemplary service to them through TEAM IDVA's core values of teamwork, excellence, accountability and motivation. Serving those who served and striving to ensure every veteran thrives in Illinois is the hallmark of what we do for Illinois veterans, their families and survivors.

With the leadership of the IVAC's Chairman, Colonel Bob Tyler, United States Marine Corps (retired), and Vice-Chairwoman Shannon Yount, USMC, IDVA is proud to collaborate with them. The dedicated volunteer members of the Illinois Veterans Advisory Council (IVAC) who study veteran issues and advise Illinois leadership, provide recommendations on how to improve support, benefits, and services for veterans and their families. IVAC is diverse and brings unique perspectives from across the state, so that the concerns of every veteran are considered. Each committee member offers their own experiences and understandings,

which creates rich and thoughtful discussion.

This past year, we approached challenging subjects with productive dialogue and innovation. Policy changes at the federal level initiated a swift analysis of its impact on Illinois veterans and we brainstormed how to communicate with and reassure veterans facing uncertainty about their benefits.

A special thank you to the members of the IVAC and the organizations they represent. Their commitment to IVAC and to veterans and their families has had a profound impact on this committee.

As President Obama once said, "If you put on the uniform and risk your life to keep us safe, we'll do our part for you." I look forward to another year of partnership and the IVAC's support of IDVA's mission of doing our part to help veterans thrive in Illinois.

Sincerely,

Terry Prince

IDVA Director and U.S. Navy Veteran

★ Chairman's Report



As noted elsewhere in this report, the purpose of the Illinois Veterans Advisory Council (IVAC) is to advise the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) on those issues and concerns most significant to Illinois veterans. The IVAC composition is unique as its membership includes four members of the General Assembly, four appointees from State Agencies, six veterans appointed by the IDVA Director, and members appointed by their respective veteran service organization (VSO). This combination of government and non-government representation provides relevant and diverse advice to the IDVA Director. During CY 2025 the IVAC continued to review efforts that facilitate successful veteran re-entry to local communities and employment following active-duty service. The IVAC reviewed both government and VSO policies, programs, and efforts that addressed veteran transition, unemployment, education, homelessness, suicide prevention, mental health, and other issues during its quarterly meetings.

Appreciating that each of the members come from organizations engaged in honoring all Illinois veterans while still addressing the above veteran issues, the IVAC members were invited to share information about their organization's specific veteran efforts. As an example of how Illinois governmental agencies strengthened their commitment to serving veterans through expanded outreach, meaningful recognition, and improved access to services, the Secretary of State's Office hosted a Veterans Celebration event that included a mobile DMV site that processed multiple applications for service underscoring their comprehensive approach to veteran assistance. Through the office's Veteran History Project dozens of veteran stories have been preserved. Additionally, numerous videos, photographs, letters and personal histories have been added to the archive which will ensure that the experiences of Illinois veterans will be preserved for future generations. At the same time, the VSOs often connect with veterans within their local community. For example, the several thousand members of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) in Illinois secured nearly \$10,000 in community outreach grants from the national MOAA Foundation. All four chapters offered multiple thousand-dollar scholarships to rising college freshmen, provided awards and scholarships to cadets in over twenty-five ROTC / JROTC units, supported local community food banks, Honor Flights, Wreaths Across America, and the USO. Additionally, several MOAA members serve in leadership positions in other VSOs and community organizations.

In support of IDVA's mission of positioning veterans to thrive in Illinois, the IVAC reviewed IDVA's strategic plan this year and appreciates its efforts in modernizing IDVA information technology systems and social media presence. Such improvements should make inter-organizational collaboration easier while presenting veterans with a "one-stop" information access portal. In returning to its primary task, the IVAC's recently created working groups continue their work assessing the re-entry process for service members within the state and reviewing the IVAC bylaws. The overarching goal of these two groups is to identify potential synergism and collaboration with the plethora of agencies, organizations and groups dedicated to supporting and lifting up Illinois veterans.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to each council member for their dedication, expertise, and unwavering commitment to serving veterans. Furthermore, speaking for the entire IVAC, we thank Director Prince and his staff for their unwavering support. Together we achieved meaningful progress, and our collective efforts that honor, remember, and support Illinois veterans will make a lasting impact on them, their families, and the great state of Illinois.

Sincerely,

Bob Tyler

Chairman

Illinois Veterans Advisory Council

★ History of the Illinois Veterans Advisory Council

Pursuant to Public Act 100-10, effective June 30, 2017, the State of Illinois created the Illinois Veterans Advisory Council (IVAC). Part of IVAC's mission is to investigate the re-entry process for service members who return to civilian life after being engaged in an active theatre. The investigation shall include the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder, homelessness, disabilities, and other issues the council finds relevant to the re-entry process. To accomplish this mission, IVAC has convened teams of experienced, professional veteran advocates, and community leaders to analyze major issue areas and develop strategic policy recommendations. IVAC's strategic policy recommendations are published annually in the IVAC Annual Report. In accordance with the Act, IVAC members include:

- Four members of the General Assembly appointed one each by the President of the Senate, the Minority Leader of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives
- Six veterans appointed by the Director of Veterans' Affairs
- One veteran appointed by the commander or president of each veterans service organization that is chartered by the federal government and by the State of Illinois and elects to appoint a member
- One person appointed by the Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard
- One person appointed by the Illinois Attorney General
- One person appointed by the Illinois Secretary of State
- One person appointed by the Director of the Illinois Department of Employment Security
- One person appointed by each military family organization that is chartered by the federal government

★ Illinois Veterans' Advisory Council

Robert "Bob" Tyler, Chairman, Military Officers Association of America
Shannon Yount, Vice Chairwoman, Office of the Attorney General

GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEMBERS

The Honorable Mike Porfirio
The Honorable Craig Wilcox
The Honorable Dan Swanson

APPOINTED BY

Illinois State Senator
Illinois State Senator
Illinois State Representative

EXTERNAL AGENCY APPOINTEES

Ms. Elizabeth Roxworthy
Jorge Eric Bermudez
Adam Broshous

Department of Military Affairs
Illinois Department of Employment Security
Illinois Secretary of State

DIRECTOR'S APPOINTEES

Bill Wolff
Kevin Wathen
Robert Norman
Frank Gutierrez
Vince Long
Larry Miller

Veteran Advocate
Veteran Advocate
Veteran Advocate
Veteran Advocate
Veteran Advocate
Veteran Advocate

VETERAN SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS/AFFILIATES

Al Reynolds
Bruce Blackmer
Michael Peck
Joe Bartley
Dr. Jerry Field
Peggy Arick
Tim Kennedy
John "Dutch" DeGroot
Roy L. Dolgos
Lee Lopez
Ray Dieter

Disabled American Veterans
Marine Corps League
The American Legion
AMVETS
Jewish War Veterans
Blue Star Mothers of America
Catholic War Veterans
Veterans of Foreign Wars
Vietnam Veterans of America
Military Order of the World Wars
Reserve Organization of America

ALTERNATE MEMBERS

Greg Padovani
Art Dutkovic
Jay Davis
Hugh Shown
George Mulvaney
Crystal Womack

American Legion
Military Order of the World Wars
Veterans of Foreign Wars
Reserve Organization of America
Marine Corps League
Illinois Veterans' Advisory Council, Secretary

★ Synergy Between Veterans' Stakeholders

Having continuity among veteran committees associated with Illinois state agencies, Veterans' Service Organizations, and all other stakeholders is essential for several reasons:

- **Consistent Advocacy and Support:** Continuity ensures that there is an ongoing, reliable advocacy for veterans' needs. Veteran committees play a crucial role in identifying issues, proposing solutions, and advocacy for necessary changes. Consistent leadership and membership allow for a deeper understanding of veterans' issues and sustained advocacy efforts.
- **Policy Implementation:** Continuity helps in the seamless implementation of policies and programs. Veteran committees often work closely with state agencies to design and implement initiatives that support veterans. Continuity ensures that these initiatives are carried out effectively and are not disrupted by frequent changes in leadership or membership.
- **Institutional Knowledge:** Committees with long-term members retain valuable institutional knowledge. This knowledge includes understanding past challenges, what strategies have been effective, and what areas need improvement. Such historical perspective is crucial for making informed decisions and building on past successes.
- **Trust and Relationships:** Building trust and strong working relationships with veterans, state agencies, and other stakeholders takes time. Continuity fosters these relationships, leading to better collaboration and communication. Veterans are more likely to engage with committees and seek help if they see familiar and trusted faces.
- **Efficient Resource Utilization:** Continuity allows for more efficient use of resources. New members require time to get up to speed, which can slow down progress and lead to duplicated efforts. Long-term members can focus resources on advancing ongoing projects and initiatives rather than spending time on orientation and training.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Long-term committees are better positioned to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of programs and services. They can track progress over time, identify trends, and make necessary adjustments to improve outcomes for veterans.
- **Crisis Response:** In times of crisis, such as natural disasters or economic downturns, continuity in veteran committees ensures a swift and coordinated response. Experienced members can quickly mobilize resources, provide support, and address emergent needs effectively.
- **Building Legacy and Momentum:** Consistent leadership and membership help build a legacy of service and a momentum for continuous improvement. Long-term committees can set and achieve long-term goals, creating a lasting positive impact on the veteran community.

In summary, it is crucial to maintain continuity in veteran committees associated with Illinois state agencies. This is essential for effective advocacy, policy implementation, resource utilization, and overall support for veterans. It ensures stability, fosters trust, and enables sustained progress in addressing the unique challenges faced by veterans.

★ Illinois Veterans Re-entry and Unemployment

The Veterans' Service-Related Ailments Task Force that was dissolved December 31, 2021, previously concluded that the period of moving from serving in the military to civilian life can be challenging. Successful reintegration into their communities is a primary contributor lowering homelessness, unemployment, drug abuse, and many mental health issues. The various government and non-government veteran service organizations provide information about and access to transition resources within their local communities. Here are just a few Illinois initiatives and programs designed to support veterans:

- **Veterans' Employment Preference:** Illinois has laws in place that give veterans preference in hiring for state jobs. This preference helps veterans secure employment within state agencies and departments.
- **Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES):** IDES offer a range of services specifically for veterans, including job search assistance, resume writing workshops, interview preparation, and job fairs. They also have Veteran Employment Representatives who provide personalized help to veterans.
- **Homegrown By Heroes:** The Homegrown by Heroes program allows Illinois farmers, ranchers, fishermen and producers who have served or are still serving in any branch of the U.S. military to use a special logo on the agricultural products they sell to the public. This special designation sets these farmers apart in the market, allowing these heroes' products to be visible to consumers while giving them the chance to tell their story.
- **Illinois Joining Forces (IJF):** This statewide, public-private network aims to improve the coordination and delivery of services to veterans. They focus on areas such as employment, education, housing, and wellness, ensuring veterans have access to comprehensive support.
- **Illinois Job-Link:** This online job board connects job seekers with employers. Veterans can create profiles, upload resumes, and search for job openings tailored to their skills and experiences. Employers can also specifically search for veteran candidates.
- **Veteran-Owned Small Business (VOSB) and Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) Programs:** These programs encourage state agencies to do business with veteran-owned businesses. This not only supports veteran entrepreneurs but also creates job opportunities within these businesses.
- **Educational Benefits:** Illinois offers various educational benefits to veterans, such as the Illinois Veterans' Grant and the Illinois National Guard Grant, which cover tuition and mandatory fees at Illinois state-supported colleges, universities, and community colleges. These programs help veterans gain the education and skills needed for the civilian job market.
- **Veteran assistance at Community Colleges and State Universities:** In addition to educational programs, Illinois colleges and universities host veteran affinity groups with shared experiences and mutual support for successful college studies and subsequent employment. Notable in this effort is the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana campus' Chez Center
- **Employer Outreach and Engagement:** The state actively engages with employers to promote the hiring of veterans. Initiatives like the Illinois Hires Heroes Consortium encourage employers to adopt veteran-friendly hiring practices and recognize businesses that demonstrate a commitment to hiring veterans.
- **Translating Military Skills to Civilian Jobs:** Programs and workshops are available to help veterans translate their military skills and experiences into civilian job qualifications. This includes assistance with resume writing and interview skills tailored to the civilian job market.
- **Networking and Mentorship:** Illinois supports networking events and mentorship programs that connect veterans with industry professionals and potential employers. These connections can provide valuable job leads, career advice, and support during the job search process.
- **Collaboration, Synergy, and Continuity of Care:** With the plethora of veteran service organizations, many of which address pressing immediate needs. It is important that those assisting veterans collaborate so that immediate care can provide healing or a solution to social-economic needs while moving the veteran towards healthy independence. In joining resources, this continuum of care assists in making the veteran's transition successful.

★ Homelessness

While many organizations have addressed veteran homelessness issues, veterans remain a significant portion of the homeless population. Many face unique challenges and needs due to their military service. As we reported last year, according to the January 2024 Point-in-Time count led by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), it estimates that the total number of Veterans who were experiencing homelessness at that time was 32,882. According to HUD the estimated number of Veterans experiencing homelessness in America has declined by 55.6% since 2010. To combat veteran homelessness, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has expanded its efforts through additional funding and grants to veterans and organizations assisting veterans. Accordingly, the IVAC encourages both government and non-governmental organizations to become familiar with the VA's program. Further the IVAC urges state and county governments and community-based entities to maintain investments that are preventing homelessness and re-housing those who have become homeless.

★ Conclusion

The Illinois Veterans Advisory Council's annual report serves as a testament to the unwavering commitment and dedication of all those involved in supporting and advocating for our state's veterans. Throughout the past year, the Council has focused on sharing information relevant to veterans within the state. The Council continues to address the unique transitional challenges veterans and their families face when returning from active-duty assignments while seeking ways to highlight the many veterans who have answered the call and returned to become "responsible members of the republic" as our everyday neighbors. As our nation approaches its 250th anniversary, we honor all who have worn the cloth of our nation, care for those who need our care, and promise to never forget those who gave their all.

This report continues to highlight the IVAC's multifaceted approach of collaboration with multiple stakeholders, community engagement, and the review of proposed legislation toward supporting the state's veteran population. By fostering partnerships with legislators, state agencies, veterans service organizations, and private companies, the IVAC continues to create comprehensive programs and initiatives that cater to the diverse needs of Illinois veterans. The IVAC will continue to ensure Illinois Veterans' needs are being met and that their service and sacrifices continue to be appreciated and recognized.

The IVAC met on:

- March 11th, 2025
- June 10th, 2025
- September 9th, 2025
- December 16th, 2025



**For more information about the Department's programs and services, please contact:
Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs**

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