

Illinois Veterans Advisory Council – Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, December 16, 2025– 10:00am

Illinois Department of Affairs

WebEx

Attendance:

NAME	APPOINTED BY	PRESENT
Bruce Blackmer	Marine Corps League	X
Al Reynolds	Disabled American Veterans	
Senator Mike Porfirio	President of Senate	X
Senator Craig Wilcox	Minority Leader of Senate	
	Speaker of the House	
Rep. Dan Swanson	Minority Leader of the House	X
Robert Norman	IDVA Director	X
Frank Gutierrez	IDVA Director	X
Kevin Wathen	IDVA Director	
Vince Long	IDVA Director	X
Bill Wolff	IDVA Director	X
Larry Miller	IDVA Director	X
Elizabeth Roxworthy	Department of Military Affairs	X
Shannon Yount	Attorney General	X
Adam Broshous	IL Secretary of State	X
Jorge Bermudez	IL Department of Securities	
Michael Peck	The American Legion	X
Joseph Bartley	AMVETS	X
Peggy Arick	Blue Star Mothers of America	X
	Catholic War Veterans	
	Jewish War Veterans	
	Military Order of the Purple Heart	
Lee Lopez	Military Order of the World Wars	X
Ray Dieter	Reserve Officers' Association	X
John "Dutch" DeGroot	Veterans of Foreign Wars	X
	Vietnam Veterans of America	
Bob Tyler	MOAA	X

New Members:

Alternates / Guests: Art Dutkovic, Hugh Shown, George Mulvaney, Greg Padovani

Call to Order 10:00am

****Due to connectivity issues, some portions of the meeting were not recorded for minutes**

Roll Call

Pledge of Allegiance

Moment of Silence

Introductions:

IDVA Staff:

Terry Prince, Director

Anthony Vaughn, Assistant Director

Jassen Strokosch, Chief of Staff

Crystal Womack, Senior Programs Manager

Maureen Hartigan, Public Information Officer

Jenny Franklin – Director's Executive Assistant

Kimberly Yantis – Central Region Field Supervisor

Mark Patterson – Field Supervisor

Asia Gentry – Deputy Chief of Staff

Renysha Brown – Director, Veterans Accountability Unit

Alexa Koziol – Legislative Director

Dylon Hopp – Legislative Aid

Danielle Miller – Operations & Programs Manager

Margo Watson – Women Veterans Coordinator

Approval of September 9th, 2025, minutes

Motion to approve the Minutes by Bill Wolff

Mike Peck seconded the motion

Motion passed to approve the September 9, 2025 minutes

Chairman Tyler:

Thank you very much. I do want say that there's a lot of good things happening for veterans in the state, and we need to raise that up occasionally. And so, we'll talk when we get down here a little bit later. The Secretary of States sent out a really nice summary of the things that they've done this past year, this will be included in the annual report. If you didn't get a chance to see that or look at it, when Adam talks about that, think about the things that your organization has done or your department has done. At the same time, our VSO's, you know, the veteran service organizations have the responsibility to make sure that their people are showing up for the activities that we need them to do.

We were talking before the meeting about the lack of participation for the state fair. Folks aren't showing up for that. We need to make sure that those of us around here go back to our organizations and make sure that our people are participating in those things that need to see, you know, our attention to see that we have those things. Other than that, we've got some issues that will come up when we talk about the bylaw committee update and how we're gonna have to work with probably our friend Representative Swanson to make sure that we get some language taken care of to make sure that we all still have a legitimate seat at the table.

Other than that hopefully we're all set for Santa's trip. I know that Bill is out there trying to make sure we're all prepared for next week and the jolly old guys visit to our homes have it safe, warm, hopefully, less snowy Christmas than we've had the past couple of days and enjoy your holidays with your family because we're not deployed this year or whatever or hopefully, most of us are too old to be deployed again but remembering those that are and so with that, reports, Director?

Director Prince

Yeah, I'll start off with some highlights and then certainly the Chief of Staff, Deputy Chief of Staff and Assistant Director or any of our team can chime in on things that I might have missed. I don't want to bury the leads.

I'm gonna start with the opening of the Quincy Veterans home which was opened in the last quarter, and that's probably one of the most exciting things that's happened, not just for Illinois, but across the country. In the last year there were only two or three veterans homes opened in America and the Quincy home was one of them, which represents a three hundred million dollar investment in Illinois for veterans and their families. As you many of you know we opened the domiciliary probably six months prior, we have a fantastic team out there as well represented by as many of you in the room that attended the event on a relatively cold day to save the least, so very exciting time for Illinois veterans and their families with the opening of the Quincy home. As I've said around the state just the investment in general by the General Assembly and tax in the federal government in all of our veterans homes over the past four and a half to say six years, nearly five hundred million dollars has been invested in improvements and or building our veterans homes. So I want to make sure that starts off. That's one of the things we're most excited about across the organization when it comes to our veterans homes.

Not steal Mark's thunder from a veteran service officer perspective. We have nearly sixty VSO's working around the state, and over the last year we're able to achieve one of our strategic goals and that's hiring administrative assistants and outreach coordinators to help those VSO's become even more powerful in the community, getting them in to be doing claims. We've seen an increase over the years with the Pact Act and the number of veterans coming forward, not here in Illinois. For my uncle, who's actually meeting with a Wisconsin VSO today to discuss benefits that he may have heard while serving in the Marine Corps during the Vietnam and unfortunately at Camp Lejune during the days of the water situation. So veterans are out there and they're coming into our offices. They're catching us online, they're calling in for services. Many of you met Russ at the front, he's our gateway to get in. Russ is Army, he's having a bad week like the rest of the soldiers in general with football only. His Air Assault it's all

about airborne, but he's a great person to be up there meeting with our veterans as they come in the door.

With lottery, we're on track to give out a million dollars in our lottery grant program to about a dozen different organizations that are serving veterans from homelessness programs to coding services, teaching veterans, equine therapy for PTSD, the list goes on. You'll see an announcement on that in the next several weeks as that comes out.

At the Chicago Veterans home, we tasked the Chicago home by Veterans Day to have one hundred residents, and they have achieved that functionally. They're in about ninety eight because of the way that the floors are set up. We couldn't reach an even hundred. So we're letting them celebrate over the last month or so since Veterans Day and we're about to task them again with one hundred and thirty veterans by Memorial Day. And so we're slowly but surely getting veterans into the Chicago veterans home. A lot of it folks has to do with staffing. Full disclosure, hiring veteran nurse assistance, VNAC's as they're called is a challenge. Many of the VNAC's that work for IDVA have been at IDVA for several years, if not longer, and the newer VNAC's coming out wanna come in and then they want to kind of move up to ladder and it's just a little bit more challenging to hire them. In the nursing home that is really kind of the tip of the spear as it were. But the Chicago home and our new administrator, Jennifer Malone, who served as the assistant director of nursing is now the official home administrator there, so we're promoting from within, has got a really good plan and she's doing some great things. So for our folks in the Cook county area and surrounding if you ever want a chance to come and see the Chicago home and check it out for yourself. We encourage you to give us a call and let us know as members of the IVAC and certainly a general public we can make that happen or any of our veterans homes for that matter, just give us a little notice so we can let the veterans know and get the staff prepped for any kind of visits that might go on.

Chief, I covered hiring. We got a new state education director. Many of you know Dan Wellman, Dan Wellman who was a nationwide leader in state approving agency. That's the program that coordinates all of the the educational benefits flowing from the federal government and all of the states. So coordinating all of the educational activities around the state. We're proud to again have promoted someone from within. And his name is Jeff Lewis. Jeff Lewis also United States Marine Corps Veteran, who was our southern region supervisor for the Veteran Service officers has moved up into the position to be the state approving agency authority. So when you see Kim, make sure you give her a hug because she's kind of covering central and southern from what I understand and Kim also Navy veteran, we're gonna make sure we amplify Navy and Marine Corps veterans throughout this meeting. If for no other reason, then just see Colonel Swanson give me the look every now and again. So, AD and Chief I'll turn it over to you if you have anything additional to add.

Chief of Staff

The only other thing I'd add, not nearly as high file profile as Quincy, of course, but during that same time period we did also open a significant renovation on the south of the Lasalle home for folks who don't know is the building itself isn't changing from an external standpoint, but they're going through and completely down to the studs renovating it internally in the first phase of that opened up, about a month and a half ago, so there's a forty veterans are still living in that area that are now in a brand new space inside the existing facility, and then those folks shifted over and we're now

renovating the other side of the building. So by the time that construction's all completed, that building, a vast majority of the living space in that building will look brand new. So just it not quite as fancy and as big an investment as Quincy but for the folks that are living there are huge impact on their living space.

Director Prince:

Yeah, super exciting. They got the east coast, west coast in like a school eighties rap contest going on. So the west coast recently opened and they're working on the east coast. And again, a full reno, and so LaSalle and are more importantly our veterans that have lived there and our employees are seeing the constant investment of resources into the homes. And so we're very proud of that. And then you just reminded me for those that are in the Manteno area, maybe wondering about the Prince Home, Idva's homeless program, not named after me, I always have to say that it's in the contract. We're working on refurbishing that. We've relocated the few veterans we had into other services. Two of the veterans that were at the Prince home actually have jobs at the IDVA Manteno home. So that was kind of exciting. And we're planning on turning the Prince home into a Women Veterans with Families homeless center. With all the services that are available key area and some really great option working with Eric Peterson, the county's veterans advisory superintendent up there. I've got some really good ideas going on. So awesome stuff going on in the homes.

Certainly you've met some of our new here at headquarters. They've introduced themselves, Mark, did I miss anything on VSO? And then if I may, last thing I had Mr. Chairs I want to say to Crystal, you know, who's always behind the scenes making all this happen. Today is Crystal's work anniversary here, I think nine years at IDVA. Very good. So Crystal, thank you for your service both as the the Marine spouse and certainly as a IDVA and all the work that you do to keep the machine going behind the scenes and often right in front of it.

Danielle, anything from a program's perspective? Maureen, anything from a comms piece.

Maureen Hartigan:

Good Morning, our annual report will be disseminated and published at the beginning of January. So we will share that with you and you'll be able to see a recap of everything that has happened at IDVA in fiscal year twenty twenty five.

Margo Watson:

So for the very first time in history, Illinois has reached the goal of five hundred and five hundred is five hundred enrollments for Illinois Women Veterans to enroll in the woman military's memorial. So we're so excited to say that. We have doubled the enrollment of last year, which was great. And I just wanna applaud all the women veterans of Illinois for doing this because this is quite in accomplishment. I'm so excited. Thank you very much.

Director Prince:

No, thank you and we're gonna be recognized as a state at the National Association of Directors in March in Washington D C, the Women Veterans Memorial Chair President will come and present a certificate to Illinois, saying thank you for your effort in this. So getting women veterans, and especially in this day and age when museums and other things are under assault, it's ever more important to get women veteran

accomplishments into that museum and forever ensuring in our history, so we're very proud of that.

Assistant Director Vaughn:

I don't have anything for this group, as always happy to see everyone. I'm just moving forward with, my normal duties.

Director Prince:

Thank you. Last but not least, Mr. Chair and Madam Vice Chair, we have our legislative, I don't know if they have anything. Alexa is literally just starting, so you're gonna see a lot of her and then of course everybody knows Dylan, who's bringing his talents over from the federal side and is working with us now. Alexa, Dylan anything else to add?

Alexa Koziol:

As the director mentioned, I, just started. This is my third week here and I'm excited to work with you folks moving forward.

Director Prince:

So Alexa is bringing her talents over from DCFS, so she is well versed. Deputy Chief, did you have something?

Asia Gentry:

Yeah, just, again, I was gonna say Alexa joins us from DCFS where she was there for eleven years, so she has an extensive knowledge of, the players and staff there at the capital, so really excited to have her. Alexa, did you want to I know this group is always interested in our proposals going forward to the next year, did you want to just quickly tell them the two proposals that we have that were approved by the Govs office or I can keep talking or if you'd like to just kind of brief the group real quickly? It's something that you had asked about at the last. I believe.

Yeah, just two minor changes. So one of them and we will give you a better briefing at the at the next meeting because again, we don't have a white page or anything. These were just approved by the Govs office I think last week. We'll be making some changes to our VSO requirements, which will help Mark and his team to strengthen that pool of candidates, and then we are going to be changing the grant process to biannual as opposed to quarterly. So just two small things for this year and then with Alexa here, we're really excited to work with you all and be more bold going into the coming years. And the last thing I wanted to say was we also had Maureen join today because last time you had all asked for, a brief overview of our website, so I'm not sure when you want to fit that into the meeting, but she's here and can explain that as well.

Chairman Tyler:

Okay, and I will take a short comments from the members of the council that are members and we'll start with the Senator Porfirio, please. You have any comments for the group this morning sir?

Senator Porfirio:

Thank you. Mr. Chair, you know, obviously we're getting ready for next year's session. You know, please let me know if there's anything I can be helpful with, but otherwise nothing for the group but happy to stand by for any questions from the group.

Representative Swanson:

Glad to be here and appreciate all the work that everybody does for our veterans. It's a great effort and as Senator Porfirio said, as a chair of the Senate, I'm also the chair of the House Veterans Committee. We work closely on legislation. We take our jobs as chairman very seriously, so as we move forward into the legislative cycle right now, the legislative cycle, we're writing legislation. We have deadlines and we have to measure on that. If we don't meet those deadlines, it's hard to get legislation introduced, so if you have something here I would be more than happy to help get that through the process or carry it on the floor.

Bill Wolff:

You know we started a program in November about collecting cold weather gear. Coats hat, gloves. We did over five hundred coats and gloves that we presented to Hines Hospital and Jesse Brown Hospital. We started up a new food bank at Hoffman Estates building, which is kind of a little offshoot from Hines and that's working out quite well. We're donating about four hundred dollars a month and canned goods and stuff that the veterans can pick up there when they're going to pick up their hearing aids or glasses and stuff. We kind of gave up on starting lines and deadlines. Veterans need help all the time. And that's kind of something that we've got focused in. Our particular groups of passing out something all the time. I was fortunate enough to come across twenty six boxes of hooded zippered sweatshirts that somebody was looking to find a home. So I took everything that they had distributed it to once again Hines, Jesse Brown and anybody else that knew of a particular home that could use some brand new hooded sweatshirts. It's just a thing of trying to, you know, keep people motivated enough to keep going and going and going with because our our veteran community needs all the help they can get. And we're trying to do that. That's it.

Robert Norman:

Right now the Illinois Council of Chapters for MOAA, which is led by Colonel Tyler himself. We support the MOAA National Scholarships with five, twenty five thousand dollars scholarships that somehow they worked the funding and are able to provide moneies to several students. Every year MOAA sends scholarships out to all the children of actively serving and retired members. Unfortunately, children of veterans are not eligible for the scholarship. Last year they had sixteen million dollars to send out and did not send out all of that money. This year they have eighteen million and we're hoping that we'll get a better crop of, applications for that. We also have a program within the militarities called Communities Support Grant, and in the communities around the state that partner with a MOAA chapter, they are eligible for up to five thousand dollars in grant money to help a veteran cause. There's about twelve different categories that this falls under. So, I know there have been, somewhere along the lines of over thirty grants that have been sent out. I'm not sure how many in Illinois. Unfortunately, our chapter has not been successful yet trying to figure out who to partner with down in Southwest Illinois, but we do have that capability. The council also sponsors the Veterans Day at the state Fair. The JROTC drill comp that happens there

and we provide monies for that. So. I think that just about covers everything although one thing that we did start here in Southwest, back in May and I mentioned this a while back, if you may remember. We had our first and enlistee recognition ceremony to recognize the future veterans from this area under the banner of our community salutes and we're looking forward to next year's on April 30th down here in O'Fallon. So we had forty six in listees last year. Hopefully now with the recruiters more on board, we'll be able to recognize more of those young men and women who choose to wear the cloth of the nation. And that's all I have, sir.

Chairman Tyler:

Thank you very much. I should mention that he knows a lot of the money that's coming into the council for MOAA because he also serves as my treasurer for the state for MOAA things, so I try to keep Bob as busy as I can, you know. Thank you Bob.

Vince Long:

Our local county VAC office this year so far, we have brought back over four million dollars back into the county, and our superintendent is very good at what he does and processing the claims, and we even processed claims for people out of our county that don't have VAC's. And on the VFW side, tomorrow my wife is getting ready to go to Quincy, with a whole car load of stockings and candy and cards for the veterans over there.

Frank Gutierrez:

With the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County, we originally submitted a five million dollar budget request to meet the increasing demand of our veteran service officers. It was reduced to three point two million during the county review process and this reduction wasn't really based on our program performance or a decline in need. Our demand actually continues to go up and the commission is operating at or near our capacity. Any limitations in services that we're currently providing is due to funding constraints rather than our operational efficiencies. Despite these constraints, the VAC actually, just last month alone with two service officers, we assisted seventy nine veterans and generated an estimate of one point two million dollars in federal funding. And this actually kind of reflects a one to five, one to four funding multiplier making our VAC the only county supported organization that effectively essentially pays for itself while bringing federal dollars directly to Cook county communities. I do want to invite everybody to our next meeting on December 18, tomorrow at seven PM at the AMVETS post one ninety two. I put all the information in the comments, feel free to click on the link and register. Two more things that I kind of want to bring up separate from the VAC is back in January 1, 2019 the state of Illinois implemented ISERRA. ISERRA was designed to improve the lives of veteran or service members that are called to duty here in the state of Illinois. I do want to make a comment that the Chicago Park District finalized revisions to its code last May during military appreciation month that reduced their benefits for the park district employees under the revised policy military payment differential is no longer provided for the full duration of a service member's military orders. This change has increased financial strain on effective service members and it has broader implications for public sector veterans that, you know, we're part of the, we're part of these organizations that did pay differential throughout the life of their orders. Now the park district is doing the bare minimum. One more thing that I want to talk about is, you know we keep talking about improving the transition of veterans

returning to Illinois. I want to make sure that, you know we have to do something because not all state funded entities have veteran procurement set asides or workforce initiatives and any state funded entity I feel should be providing that at the minimum.

Larry Miller:

On September 20th, the Scott POW MIA council had recognition ceremony at the O'Fallon post 805. We had 2 former POW's that attendance, one from World War II and one from Vietnam. It was something they do every year on the Saturday after the POW/MIA date. From a personal side, we talk about various therapies for PTS and there's equine therapies and so forth. I'm involved in what they call Six String Heroes or we take veterans in the VA system and we teach them how to play guitar. We give them six lessons. There's similar program nationwide called Guitars for Vets, which I understand this program started with that there was a falling out between leadership and so they became Six String Heroes. We gave them six or eight lessons presented with the guitar and then I'll asked him to come back and, participate in jam sessions. I finally got a veteran to work with and he tried to play guitar, it's more challenging than expected to teach someone else. I'm involved with the VFW, American Legion, AMVETS, and Vietnam Veterans and I have little pieces to play in each of those so, since they're all represented here, I'll let them talk.

Col Peck:

Our coalition up north under the AUSA is helping on the America 250 project. I've talked to, Director Prince on this, but what we'd like to do in July is to honor the career of Kernel Paul Tibbitz who's born in Quincy Illinois. I've asked, Representative Swanson to pass the resolution that we could put on a plaque and place it in the all Wars Museum there in Quincy. We also like to honor the career of a Colonel George Marshall. You may not know this, but Colonel Marshall prior to becoming chief of staff of the army and organizer of victory was the Senior Advisor to the Illinois National Guard. This is where he got his training to go forth and then eventually train eleven million men for World War II. Then at the cemetery, we have a Major Arthur Botnan. If you enter Fort Sheridan you'll see a statue of Jesus, it's the only national VA cemetery to have a statue of Jesus. This statute was damaged three years ago, we've been trying for three years now to get the VA to repair it. We have funds locally to do it, but we need permission from the VA to do it. And we're working with the Congressman Schneider to do that. In the meantime, we're trying to pass a resolution honoring a career Major who was the first Catholic priest to become a chaplain. And then finally, our major project under America two fifty is the placement of the Medal of Honor plaques in the capital recognized all one hundred and seventeen Medal of Honor recipients from the state of Illinois. That's about it. Only one last thing, did we ever get a resolution on the legal side for of having the the IVAC pass resolutions?

Dutch DeGroot:

Yes, thank you very much chairman. Well, good morning and happy holidays our veterans family here. The VFW department in Illinois is still very active in expanding the Veterans Assistance Commissions in new counties. The VFW worked with VAC liaison, Doug Jameson who has been instrumental in adding Washington, Clinton, Monroe, Fayette, Jefferson, and Williamson and soon to be at Randolph and Union to VAC family. Doug is also assisting Hancock and Douglas to conform with MBAA requirements. As you know the county vacs has also added a fifth division. Myself I concentrate on VAC at Cook County which are community and I'll echo what Frank said,

we were very disappointed that we didn't get our full budget because we sure could use it. Veterans are knocking at the door. We break records every month. We'd shatter the record from the month before. The last thing is the Department of Illinois VFW is also a strong advocate of the Illinois Veterans Gaming initiative. As you notice it helps vets with real help and we have found as helpful to combat long lists and tell vets how they can earn benefits on the site creating camaraderacy and a purpose in life. That's all I have.

Chairman Tyler:

In the interest of time, instead of me calling everybody at this point in time, I've kept track of who we've had and we'll make sure next time we'll reverse the order and go from the other side. But does anybody else have anything significant to share at this time? Please raise your hand and we'll give you a second or two here. Any other comments?

Vice Chair Yount:

So I can bring up about what the Attorney General's office is doing real quick. And it's in regards to webinars for members of the veteran and service member community. If you're not already on our email distributions send me an email. We have a webinar in January for state charter applications, in April we have MBAA in May we have ACERA and then in recognition of military consumer month, we're having one in July. So if you're interested in any of those webinars, just send me an email and we'll add you to the email distribution so you can sign up.

Chairman Tyler:

Anybody else have anything they want to share at this time? Thank you. And thanks for the reports that we had so far. I'm sorry we're running out of time on those. We all have lots of good things that we're doing and it's good to get those out and I would encourage each of you to send Crystal and me an email of those things that you're doing that we can include in the annual report. Courtney Sanders go ahead.

Courtney Sanders:

I just want to mention Blue Star Families this year on November first put on our inaugural caregiver symposium for military and veteran families. We did have over about fifty seven caregivers from six different states that attended that caregiver summit. It was put on in collaboration with the Elizabeth Dole Foundation, the Red Cross, Military Veteran Caregiver Network, and the Carter Center. We also hosted a resource fair at that event where we had over twenty five vendors. Very, very well received and because of how well received, it was the Chicago land chapter will be focusing on caregiver support in the next year.

Chairman Tyler:

Thank you very much and the Blue Star Mothers serve a really good purpose, particularly for the residents in Illinois because we don't have the normal organizations that are major active duty units like Camp Lejeune or Pendleton or whatever for the Marines that have family support things. So what the Blue Star Mothers do is really important, particularly for our deployed guard servicemen and other family members that are here without their normal support that's with them. So thank you very much for that.

Courtney Sanders:

Comment just a quick point. We are Blue Star Families not Blue Star Mothers. I know Blue Star Mothers is on the call also, but we're often confused as organizations, and so I do just want to make the point that I am Blue Star Families.

Peggy Arick:

I am Peggy Arick and I am Blue Star Moms, and there is a difference. Blue Star Moms are an organization that does support active military. We recently sent seventy three boxes of goodies to deployed soldiers and we also support the veterans in the Peoria area. We recently gave them gift cards for Walmart from the Wayne Downing home.

Chairman Tyler:

Super. Thanks for clarifying that. Appreciate it.

The transition working group, we've had lots of activity collectively around the table on looking at transition and how to help veterans transition for their active service to back into society. Unfortunately, I had very little direct input on any of that, so we still need to keep the transition things focused because as we all know, if we can solve the transition problem and get people out of uniform back into the civilian workforce, we tackle the issues of homelessness of unemployment and all those other things that causes the problems that we have to work, and we need to get back into those citizen soldiers that, you know, went and walked out to Concord and to the battlefields in Vicksburg and Gettysburg and whatever else and then went home to at that time to their farms and their businesses and became citizens. We need to figure out how to make that happen smoothly and well for all of our folks. So please keep working on that.

I think everybody's spoken, so I think we're back to the old business, so Shannon tell us, talk to us about the bylaw draft composed.

Vice Chair Yount:

So I just wanna bring up that this meeting's gonna take longer than an hour that has been a common practice, but we do have a lot of content that we've already been talking about, and we have a lot of content that we will need to talk about, so I apologize in advance that this takes longer than an hour. Not me speaking specifically, but as a overall the meeting is going to take longer than an hour. So the discussion on the bylaw draft, so we've had about four meetings. Those that have been helping me with the bylaws reviewing them, talking about it. I apologize all the time to Larry and Dutch because something that could take up to ten seconds has ended up being a thirty minute discussion on words. And one of those words is something that we're gonna be talking about specifically in the IVAC right now. In the legislation there is a word that is very important to us and it's what allows members of the council. So according to the act. And this is one thing that we as a committee have talked about and we're gonna talk about it now, those that are on the committee, I'm looking for this specific section. So section fifteen A three, a veteran appointed by the commander or president of each veteran service organization that is chartered by the federal government and by the state of Illinois in elects to appointment a member. So with that being read the way it is members of the council who are with a veteran service organization must be chartered by the federal government and by the state. It's not an OR, it's and.

Chairman Tyler:

The significance of that is there's only one VSO chartered right now in the state. One chartered chapter. You know part of this game about because when the statute was originally written the state had no method or process of chartering organizations. And last year legislation was passed that allowed for chartering of organizations. But the statute was written and now none of us around the table are chartered with the state. And so we either have to figure out how to charter us or we need to probably change that word or amend that word to an or.

Vice Chair Yount:

So the veterans service organization Charter Act specifically specifies veteran service organizations, and so it pulls in for this one, and there is and to bring up the point even though IVAC legislation was already effective and it existed prior to the state Charter Act, there was no grandfathering. So the organizations that are veteran service organizations have to be federally chartered and they have to be state chartered. And since there's a mechanism organizations would need to do both.

The Illinois Attorney General's office is the one that oversees and has the approval for state charter status. And there's three avenues for seeking state charter status for veterans service organizations. The first one is congressionally chartered organizations, auxiliaries of congressionally chartered organizations, and then non for profits. And each one meet has a different requirement and what they need to each provide.

There is the webinar like the, probably the third Wednesday or Thursday of the month and if you guys wanna attend the webinar, and also if you guys want us to, if an organization or individuals they want to have a meeting and have like a discussion with the bureau, the person that oversees the applications, they can just reach out to me. And we can have a conversation, not me specifically, I'll be there just to answer any questions that I can or clarify anything that you guys have. Cause I am familiar with how veteran service organizations are mostly formed and how they're broken down, and that will be helpful for those that are seeking state charter status.

Representative Swanson:

So the first thing we need to know is what organizations are already federally chartered. Because I can't become a state charter unless we're already recognized as a federal charter. So unless I know what organizations are already federally chartered. I can't become a state organization and request to be chartered unless it's already chartered federally, because it's and federally chartered and state chartered. So you've gotta be a list. I mean I've seen the list, but I'm just sharing with everyone, we need to see who those federals are. And once, let's say headquarters, Illinois American Legion is chartered are all post are they considered chartered then also?

Vice Chair Yount:

So this would be a question more specific with the attorney that oversees the applications, but what we have expressed is that, individual chapters and posts should, if they want to seek state charter status, they should apply. And then in regards to the headquarters level, it most likely would be specific to that headquarters. For purposes of what the headquarters wants to do. Because if a headquarters were to do a blanket state charter application, and if a post or a detachment were to get something taken away from like the Secretary of State or charitable trust, then that would pull the entire state charter status for that overall entity. Does that make sense representative?

Representative Swanson:

Well, it doesn't, but I understand what you're saying. Yeah, I mean that's some big stuff.

Larry Miller:

So what that reads is that the federally chartered organizations and have to be state chartered. I think the chapter is a forty and eight chapters. And they're not even federally chartered. So I mean the forty and eight's not recognized federally with the true congressional charter. I think there's like seventy three federally chartered organizations which most of the the major VSOs are are chartered federally, and your question about if it's chartered nationally, do all the posts get charter, it doesn't say that the posts have to be it's just a representatives of the federally chartered organizations. So that means that every VSO in the state would need to go out and get a charter. And I think forty and eight is I'm not sure how the the state charter thing reached but forty and eight is chartered by each individual chapter as opposed to a statewide organization.

Vice Chair Yount:

Yes, one chapter applied as themselves, and it wasn't the headquarters or anything. It was just an individual chapter.

Larry Miller:

So in the bylaws what started the discussion was to change if we could somehow get that changed from and state to or state. Makes it a lot easier than everybody going out and applying for state charters. I say makes it easier to get a legislative process going.

Joe Bartley:

Yeah, I would think if you change it to or then somebody who got who went out there and did the state charter that would then open up like forty and eight.

Larry Miller:

It's going to fall into that soon because they're looking at national organization of disbanding. So each of the various state and chapter organizations are gonna have to, to do something to allow that.

Vice Chair Yount:

And if you change it from and/or, it could expand more voices in IVAC for those that haven't been able to have a seat at the table. Those that would only be able to reach state charter status.

Chairman Tyler:

We're working that obviously. And any other discussion on this at this point in time before we move on to other comments as far as the bylaws and what you're doing with that Shannon?

Vice Chair Yount:

Does anybody that has come in on virtual, have any questions?

Director Prince:

If I may, we want to make sure that we don't send all the agencies out doing all this work and other things. So I guess we would like to know the timeline of what that change of two words would look like that we could expect. And we're gonna have a bunch of organizations doing a lot of paperwork. Can we save that trouble by saying to them, hey, over the next three months we're going to work on legislative change.

Representative Swanson:

Yeah, so I'm looking at that right now director, by the sixteenth of January we need to have the language. I would need to have language into the LRB the Legislative review board. Then after the sixteenth, we go into what's called the blackout period, which allows them to do all their work within the middle. On the the sixth of February is when its last day to introduce bills, which means that begins the floor action. So I mean we've got time, but I mean especially if it comes from the state agency. You guys have a little bit more leeway than, you know, was working the language and stuff. If we can come together and present some languages, either the AG or IDVA. When that gets into LRB.

Chairman Tyler:

Would it help for both to have the language coming to you?

Representative Swanson:

Just one voice. One voice would be best. And who it is doesn't matter.

Senator Porfirio:

Eligibility to be a member of this council, is it currently coupled with the charters to become a member of the VACC, and one is, do we want to keep it consistent or break it off, but I I think the reason isn't I think we're very deliberate on VACC membership and that was probably what was driving that legislation, if I remember correctly. And maybe had an unattended consequence for this specific council, but let's be careful on those definitions and make sure it's what we want. But I I think that definition came more from a VACC membership, perspective and not so much this council. So again, if we have to uncouple. But if I remember correctly, I think that was the genesis to that.

Vice Chair Yount:

It seems like there's a two words together. There might be in a couple of pieces of legislation, and it was in the MBAA and there was no definition, so that's where state charter act became something that happened in the past. But what happened was that it's the same two words that define something that was in the IVAC and in our act I think if we, and again we're looking at legislation, IDVA legislation team and the attorneys to kind of give us guidance on this. But if we were to just switch the and to an or, that doesn't change anything on the legislative side in regards to the state charter act or MBAA, it just changes IVAC so that it's either they can be congressionally chartered or state chartered and it doesn't affect anything outside of IVAC. I hope that clarifies that. I don't believe, and again, we would want to double check with the legislation team and with legal council, but we don't think there's gonna be anything that touches on MBAA because it's a separate thing, there's no crossover between the MBAA and state and IVAC. It's just this one thing has a definition now.

Senator Porfirio:

I think we just wanna make sure some additional justification around the uniqueness of this council. What I don't want to have happen is if we change one definition and then some counties or VAC's, use that as an excuse to to change other definitions. Some members of the VACC understand that apprehension.

Joe Bartley:

Again you mentioned that there's three types of state charters that the service organizations, auxiliary and the nonprofits. You know, if we go with the or, then that means it's any from all three category could then get on the IVAC. I'm just concerned about some of the expansions especially the nonprofits or the auxiliaries when you've

already got representatives of VSO's there. If you expand that definition to say or and you got three categories of state charters, now you, all three categories are now eligible for the IVAC memberships and I just want to be careful about how we're expanding the nonprofits and the auxiliaries and their potential to become IVAC members.

Vice Chair Yount:

So I think I'm gonna answer this, answer two things. So for the state Charter Act, it has three lines. So an organization, whether they're congressionally chartered or they're an auxiliary of a congressionally chartered or non for profit organization that meets very strict requirements that were approved by the General assembly. So there's three ways an entity can get state charter status, right? And once they get that state charter status, they can do what they wanted to do. If they want to have a certificate upon the wall saying they have state charger status, they can. If they want to be a member of a VAC or if they meet the requirement and they want to be a part of IVAC, I don't see a problem with that. It gives us a different perspective. So we have organizations that are on that screen right now that cannot be on IVAC because of the way it is written.

Larry Miller:

The statement is the commander or president of each veteran service organization that is chartered by. So an auxiliary is not necessarily a veteran service organization.

Chairman Tyler:

You know, so you've got a nonprofit out there that isn't part of the state charter.

Joe Bartley:

I just want to make sure that I said we don't open this up with a wide definition of all of a sudden we're putting other groups and entities on here that either are already represented by the service organizations and not just auxiliaries or there's a non profit.

Vice Chair Yount:

I understand. I just I think if so for like service members, you know, we do oversee some like transition and stuff, their input would be important.

Dutch DeGroot:

Very quick, and this is just my two cents because with this state charter thing and I know we've got to be very careful here, but the and/or what I would say is just keep it as federally chartered because you're talking about one chapter or one post. Now you're gonna say all these posts have to be that. So my two cents just keep it as federally chartered. We don't have to have a state chartered in it. Take that word out. And you're done. Thank you.

Larry Miller:

And then that goes back to, as I said Vietnam Veterans is nationally gonna be taken away their charters so by leaving out the state charter part, then the that would affect any Vietnam veteran charter chapters that remain. That is my opinion is change and/or and we're done with it for as far as membership in this council.

Vice Chair Yount:

So we also were talking about the annual report. I've talked to a few people and so right now I think there's an understanding that there's like a June or July first is the deadline. But there's nothing in there that specifically says that the chair cannot submit or publish the report prior to that. So we're going to get written in there that the finalized annual

report shall be made publicly available by a certain time, if they want to. And it'll be in accordance with the relevant provisions of the act. And then, and of course with all these recommendations, we're gonna send out the draft with all of the recommendations in there so that we can have a full on conversation. These are just recommendations that the committee had come up with. And then a couple other ones that we'll just talk about in the future because I don't want to drag it on. So is the report I heard everybody talk about it, the voting process and then establishing a clearer quorum, and then voting and nominations. So those are just a few things that we were working on based off of everybody's recommendations so we should have a draft in the near future, but we're I think we're gonna hold off to see how legislation goes in regards to in and/or. Cause that would change the bylaws.

Chairman Tyler:

I'd like to thank the members of the committee for their work in looking through that and dealing with those several issues that Shannon just talked about and from finding this one that we're trying to work on. So I really do appreciate those efforts. Any other comments or questions for Shannon and or the bylaws committee working group?

Asia Gentry:

I think just for knowledge of the group, if it's helpful as I'm looking down here our next meeting is not until March tenth, and so between now and then Shannon, Alexa, and myself will reach out to you and get more information about the current mechanisms, the law that was passed last year. We'll need to talk to the sponsor, we'll need to talk to the gov's office, so there are a lot of conversations between now and then we can have a an update though on March tenth as long as we can stay in communication here. We'll need to do that quickly.

Chairman Tyler:

Yeah, and as representing Swanson said, the deadline is 16 January and it becomes important because the driving thing.

Vice Chair Yount:

I really appreciate you bringing up to March tenth because it's March tenth, twenty twenty six. There was an oversight when I did a final look over. It's not twenty twenty five. We can't go back in history. So the next date is March tenth at twenty twenty sixth.

Chairman Tyler:

Is there any other old business that we have? We have as new business, Adam Broshous from the Secretary of States office, we we put him on the spot to say what is the secretary state offering for veterans and military families? He sent in a nice report Adam you want to say anything about that for us?

Adam Broshous:

Our communications section put together a little break letter to be included in the annual report, but just a couple of notes to highlight on that is that Secretary of State's office held a veterans, celebration event in Springfield this past year. Nearly a hundred veterans across from across the state attended. They had a mobile DMV that was present at that event. We were able to process applications for the veterans who attended. There was almost forty applications that were done for driver's license ID cards and such. They had several other secretary of state departments present as well. Such as vehicle services, administrative hearings, business services, and organ donor. The veterans history project is an interesting project that is going on and the secretary

of state's office has been trying to get that out there and make it where too veterans that it's available to them. This year they've had, three in person and one online presentation about the program aimed towards a veterans. They can fill out a Patriot application and go as far as to do a video submission through either the state library or a local library about their history as far as being a veteran in the armed forces and their experiences with that. Also within this last year, the veterans history program received four rather large extensive collections of photographs, letters, and personal histories that will be included in the archive. And then finally looking forward to effective January first, there's gonna be two additional license plates that are available to veterans. One is the air medal license plate for qualified service members and then the armed forces expeditionary metal for those that served the Arm forces afternineteen fifty and participated in a qualifying military or peace keeping operation. So adding to the already numerous number of license plates that we are able to offer to as veterans are our pride and what we accomplished. That is all. Thank you.

Chairman Tyler:

Super. Thank you sir. And, you know, that's an example of what things that we are doing besides just providing for claims to the VA and taking care of our homeless or our injured veterans, but that's providing services to all veterans and raising up the good things that veterans are doing in our society. So, thanks to the Secretary of State's office for putting that together and telling us the good things they're doing.

Is there any other new business. I see no hands. Are there any comments for the good of the council? Things that we need to talk about?

Director Prince:

Real quick for the good of the order if I may, it's my role in the national directors. I just have a couple of tidbits from the federal VA we met with Doctor Lawrence, the deputy Secretary of the Veterans administration. Paul Lawrence and the Intergovernmental Affairs deputy Secretary. This is some of the highlights from that meeting just a couple of days ago with State directors was the VA has opened up twenty one new clinics around the country. They've appointed one point four million hours of non traditional appointments so, weekends and nights. They're transitioning into doing weekend and night appointments. And you'll see in the news today, all over your news feed that the VHA, the Veterans Health Administration is being looked at to be adjusted and changed, which is typical on any administration, and of course it comes with the tagline. Will not impact veteran care. They house the most homeless veterans they've ever housed before. We shared that with our team as well, so for programs out there, if you're not already working with the VA homeless program, their budget's about three and a half billion dollars a year. So who who've all organizations to call the VA homelessness program if you have a homeless veteran coming into your mix. Last couple of things is there, the last one was they're working to reinstate veteran benefits for those veterans who were discharged from the military for refusal to take the covid nineteen vaccine. So lots of things happening at the national level Mister Chair thought I'd shared for the good of the order.

Chairman Tyler:

Thank you. Anything else for the good of the order?

Larry Miller:

I was wondering if I could meet with somebody who has anything to do with the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs Disability affidavit for Illinois Hunting and fishing privileges. I had a veteran down south say that it's a cumbersome process and they have trouble getting in and to the point where some veterans are going out to Walmart and buying their own rather than getting the benefits from this program. So I don't know who I can talk to here about that.

Jassen Strokosch (Chief of Staff IDVA):

You got some people in this room, though you chat with. Mark Patterson would be able to assist.

Adam Broshous:

If you go to the Secretary of States website, just did a search for the Veterans History Project it will bring a link up for that.

Dutch DeGroot:

Really quick and I would put this on the IDVA, just looking down a future, do you think that there's a possibility that there's a need for another veterans home. And should we start looking at that process if we deem that? I know it's a big ticket item, but, we tend to have some really friendly legislators right now, thank you chairman for being on here. And, maybe we should look at that and I wonder Director if you could start exploring that possibility.

Director Prince:

Well, we always appreciate input from this group and the veterans advisory council and we encourage this, for the organizations to reach out to your elected officials and others who will help drive that decision forward. As an agency, we're constantly looking at the best places to serve our veterans and certainly haven't settled on any particular area, but the general information that comes in and we look at that from a cost perspective for what it's worth, it costs about a million dollars of bed now to build a new veteran home somewhere. So we want you to communicate with your elected officials and let them know if you have areas that you think veterans homes would be suitable. We're certainly willing to discuss that with them.

Larry Miller:

Madison county.

Director Prince:

Full disclosure from another funding perspective, sixty five percent of the money comes from the VA if it's available. At this moment there are eighty one priority one projects with the federal VA totaling about one point three billion dollars of which one hundred and forty nine million was funded last year. That's across. So even if you have a veterans home that you want to build, you have to get that money and then the state has to also kick in thirty five percent of the cost of the veterans home. So it's very complex, as you can imagine, just to get the shovel in the ground and get reassurances from the federal government and the state that those resources would be available. So, again, closing by saying if there are areas that you really are interested in having a veterans home, communicate that with your elected officials and myself and certainly can have a conversation.

Mark Patterson:

And if I could add, I'm not advocating for one thing over the other, but just as a thought process and maybe to put a bug in the ear just to expand this is do we need another Chicago veterans home, another Quincy type veterans home or do we need five Anna type veterans homes? You know, so just something geographically just to kind of expand our thinking, are we talking about a home or are we talking about homes for veterans in the geographical areas where people live now?

Chairman Tyler:

Any other comments for the good of the order or for public comment?

Hugh Shown:

I just have a public comment. I'm representing the Reserve Organization of America, and I was unaware of it, but I wanted to mention Happy Birthday to the National Guard. And it is from December thirteenth, sixteen thirty six. So it is three hundred and eighty nine years old according to this rate. And there is some linkage going back to sixteen thirty six. Where the civilians form together to help protect the communities and things like that. So there's a history of the National Guard going back three hundred and eighty nine years, and that was news to me, but I wanted to just share that information.

Chairman Tyler:

Hearing no other comments, is there a motion to adjourn? Well, first, the next meeting date is Tuesday March tenth, twenty twenty six.

Motion to adjourn made by Joe Bartley

2nd by Larry Miller

Motion passed