

# **Illinois Veterans Advisory Council**

**Annual Report 2025**



**ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF  
VETERANS AFFAIRS**

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## \* Letter from the Director



I am pleased to present the Fiscal Year 2025 Illinois Veterans Advisory Council (IVAC) Annual Report. Since taking on the role of Director of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA), just over four years ago, many aspects of the Illinois veteran experience and service-provider community have changed. We have witnessed the hard-fought expansion of VA benefits for millions of veterans nationwide with more veterans than ever seeking access to the vital benefits and services they need and deserve. Despite the ever-changing landscape of the veteran community, the successful service of the IVAC remains strong.

Over this past year, the IVAC continued to play a critical role in serving our large and diverse veteran population by reviewing and studying the issues that are most significant to Illinois veterans and advising me on those concerns.

We are grateful for the service of U.S. Marine Corps veterans Bob Tyler and Shannon Yount, who serve as Chair and Vice-Chair respectively. Thank you to each member of the committee who volunteer their time and effort to ensure that we develop solid legislative initiatives and innovative ideas to support Illinois veterans and their families.

Our ongoing partnership and commitment to Illinois' 550,000 veterans supports IDVA's mission of ensuring that veterans truly "Thrive in Illinois." We are grateful for your continued support and commitment. Your impact on veterans across our state is significant.

Thank you for your honor, courage and commitment.

Sincerely,

Terry Prince, IDVA Director

## \* Chairman's Report



In support of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) mission of positioning veterans to thrive in Illinois, the Illinois Veterans Advisory Council (IVAC) reviewed the IDVA strategic plan this year and its effort to serve Illinois veterans throughout the state. Noting that there are over two thousand organizations across the state committed to assisting or serving veterans, the IVAC appreciates and encourages further IDVA efforts in modernizing the IDVA IT 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 created two working groups: one to assess the re-entry process for service members within the state, and another to review and, if necessary, recommend any changes to 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 Illinois veterans. It is well-recognized that a successful transition to meaningful employment minimizes the challenges of homelessness, mental health issues, and even suicide. Additionally, the IVAC will continue to be interested in veteran access to medical care, spousal employment, VA claim preparation, and maintaining the Illinois Veteran Homes. Essentially, the IVAC will continue its research and discussions to find ways to improve and address the issues affecting Illinois veterans.

As the newly elected Chairman of the IVAC, I would like to personally thank the outgoing Chairman Keith Wetherell for his two decades of service on this committee (and his two years as Chairman!) I have appreciated his veteran-centric focus and his calm leadership. On behalf of the entire committee, we wish him “Fair Winds & Following Seas” in all his future endeavors. I am honored to follow in his footsteps, and I look forward to working together for Illinois veterans. Accordingly, I would like to express my gratitude to each council member for their dedication, expertise, and unwavering commitment to serving veterans. Finally, 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 will make a lasting impact on Illinois Veterans.

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 veteran 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

**Robert “Bob” Tyler**, *Chairman, Military Officers Association of America*  
**Shannon Yount**, *Vice Chairman, Office of the Attorney General*

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEMBERS**

**The Honorable Mike Porfirio**, *Illinois State Senator*  
**The Honorable Craig Wilcox**, *Illinois State Senator*  
**The Honorable Dan Swanson**, *Illinois State Representative*

**EXTERNAL AGENCY APPOINTEES**

**Kevin Little**, *Illinois National Guard*  
**Elizabeth Roxworthy**, *Department of Military Affairs*  
**Jorge Eric Bermudez**, *Illinois Department of Employment Security*  
**Adam Broshous**, *Illinois Secretary of State*

**DIRECTOR’S APPOINTEES**

**Bill Wolff**, *Veteran Advocate*  
**Kevin Wathen**, *Veteran Advocate*  
**Robert Norman**, *Veteran Advocate*  
**Frank Gutierrez**, *Veteran Advocate*  
**Vince Long**, *Veteran Advocate*

**VETERAN SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS**

**Al Reynolds**, *Disabled American Veterans*  
**Bruce Blackmer**, *Marine Corps League*  
**Michael Peck**, *The American Legion*  
**Joe Bartley**, *AMVETS*  
**Dr. Jerry Field**, *Jewish War Veterans*  
**Peggy Arick**, *Blue Star Mothers of America*  
**Tim Kennedy**, *Catholic War Veterans*  
**Christa Hammers**, *Veterans Assistance Commission*  
**John “Dutch” DeGroot**, *Veterans of Foreign Wars*  
**Roy L. Dolgos**, *Vietnam Veterans of America*  
**Lee Lopez**, *Military Order of the World Wars*  
**Ray Dieter**, *Reserve Organization of America*

**Alternate Members**

**Greg Padovani**, *American Legion*  
**Art Dutkovic**, *Military Order of the World Wars*  
**Jay Davis**, *Veterans of Foreign Wars*  
**Hugh Shown**, *Reserve Organization of America*  
**George Mulvaney**, *Marine Corps League*

## \* Synergy Between Veterans' Stakeholders

Having continuity among veteran committees associated with Illinois state agencies, Veteran 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 lobbying 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 period of moving from serving in the military to civilian life can be challenging. To assist veterans with reintegration into their communities it is important for them to have access to transition resources that apply to their local communities. Over the past year, members of IVAC continually shared Illinois initiatives and programs with members of the veteran community. 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 offers 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.
- **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.
- **Employer Outreach and Engagement:** The state actively engages with employers to promote the hiring of veterans. Initiatives like the Illinois Hires Heroes Consortium encourages 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.



Homeless veterans are a significant portion of the homeless population, facing unique challenges and needs due to their military service. 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 further the progress of addressing homelessness among veterans, 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 fiscal year, the Council has focused on addressing the unique transitional challenges veterans and their families face when returning from active-duty assignments. Successful transition has a direct positive effect on veteran unemployment, homelessness, suicide, and general well-being. Concurrently, the IVAC continued to assess support and services available to earlier veteran generations.

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, veteran 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.

Meetings this Report Covers:

September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024

December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2024

March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2025

June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2025

To access the minutes for each meeting, please visit **[www2.illinois.gov/veterans](http://www2.illinois.gov/veterans)**. Click on the **About Us** tab and select **Committees/Task Forces** from the dropdown. From there, you will see Illinois Veterans' Advisory Council where you can access all IVAC meeting dates, agendas, minutes, and annual reports.

Special thanks to immediate past Chairman Keith Wetherell, the IDVA staff, Director Prince, Vice-Chairman Shannon Yount, our legislative members, council members, Veteran Service Organizations, and all the other supporters who steadfastly remain dedicated to supporting our veterans in every possible way.

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

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