

LaSalle County Veterans Assistance Commission

Superintendent
Christa Hammers



Assistant Superintendent
Lissa Olson

Office of the Governor
State Capital Room 207
Springfield, IL 62706

December 27, 2024

Governor Pritzker,

As required by 330 ILCS 45 (The Military Veterans Assistance Act) I am submitting the Veterans Assistance Commission of LaSalle County Annual Report for the Fiscal Year ending November 30, 2024.

As of 1984 the LaSalle County Veterans Assistance Commission was created and located in the LaSalle County Courthouse. However, in August 2021, we relocated to just south of the LaSalle Veterans Clinic in Peru to be better situated for our Veterans and Families. We now have more space to hold events/functions, a computer lab for our Veterans who need one, a conference room that our groups use for privacy, and we use for our BVA appeal hearings as well as more office space for our Outreach personnel. We have also been able to house extra supplies that our Veterans may need, such as clothing, toiletries, household goods and donations.

On December 1, 2016, Steven Kreitzer, took over this office from Martin Rue and on June 1, 2022, I, Christa Hammers was voted into the position. I have been with the office since February 2017 and continue to strive to do the best for our Veterans and Families and ensure our vision for the office carries on. Our office staff is comprised of myself, an Administrative Assistant and 3 other VSO's. One of which is the outreach VSO – travelling to Streator, Marseilles and Mendota once a week to offer easier access to assistance for our clients.

In 2024 our office focused on outreach events to help our Veterans understand our services and that we are available to assist them with all VA has to offer. In total, our office attended 18 local events and were honored to host a Quilts of Valor ceremony. Many new clients and Veterans attended our local events and our annual Expo, and we continue to partner with Hines Outreach and VR&E to provide an outreach location for their staff. We also are happy to announce that we have added a counselor from the Aurora Vet Center to our office for this next fiscal year. We continue to try and reach more Veterans by being active on both the local radio stations and social media.

Although the VA has expanded their wait time for claims to be processed from 12 months to 16, I am extremely proud of our team and the work we put into helping our clients. I am thrilled to report that our submitted claims have brought in monetary benefits for Veterans and their families totaling \$10,574,006.26. Again, this number

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is only for the fiscal year of 2024 and over \$3.2 Million more brought in in FY24 than FY23. In FY 2025, we will begin again and make every effort to be as successful as this last year.

We continue to push further education with our staff so we can stay up to date with the new legislature and best practices for our clients. Our office had one VSO take a course on Advanced Appeals training, one ready to take it in FY25, and another is slotted to start the Certified Veterans Advocate course taught by a Veterans Law

Attorney in FY25. We also continue to attend annual training courses and meetings-both state and nation-wide. Our office has attended the Illinois Association of County Officials (IACO), Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA), Illinois Association of County Veterans Assistance Commissions (IACVAC), and National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO) conferences this past year and will continue to do so in the future.

Even though I am extremely proud of my team and the number of monetary benefits we were able to bring in, and the education we have received, I am even more proud of the Events and Programs that we have offered to our Veterans and Families. In 2024, we have again participated in Operation Green light and handed out over 150 green light bulbs for Veterans day, continued the Veterans Giving Tree Event – where we connected with the LaSalle Veterans Home and the community to be sure every Veteran in the home had a gift this Christmas, decorated the windows at the LaSalle Veterans Home for the holiday season for the 5th year in a row and brought Santa to our office for our Veterans with little ones.

Our office not only offers claims assistance, programs, and events- we also assist Veterans in their time of need. Whether it is a one-time event or monthly occurrence. In 2024, we paid claims for direct financial assistance totaling \$24,754.43 via vouchers to vendors- for either rent or utilities payments. We also partner with Midwest Shelter for Homeless Veterans and a local food pantry to bring these Veterans home items such as toiletries as well as nourishment. It is this office's aim to not only see these Veterans and make sure they are receiving every benefit they are eligible for, but also connect them with other community resources that may be able to further assist them. The goal for our assistance program is to be able to give the Veteran benefits that sustain them enough that they no longer require our help. In FY24 we were able to get 4 Veterans that were homeless/nearly homeless off our general assistance program by providing help in filing claims for both Compensation and Pension. With our help these Veterans are no longer worried about a roof over their heads or food on the table and we are truly honored to be a small part of that.

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The goal of the LaSalle County Veterans Assistance Commission has always been, and will continue to be, that of assisting our Veterans and their Families in every way possible. Our office has provided great benefits for the county and our Veterans this past year and we will continue to do so for years to come. It is our honor to serve our nations hero's and their families, and we will continue to expand our services in the hopes of filling needs of even a greater number of Veterans.

Respectfully submitted,

Christa Hammers

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