

2022



2022 VETERANS LEGISLATION **SESSION SUMMARY**

Greetings from Commissioner Larry Herke



“Thanks to a combination of hard work by the Minnesota Commanders’ Task Force, the support of dedicated legislators and the leadership of Governor Tim Walz, I am pleased to report that the voices of our state’s 304,000 Veterans have been heard. For the first time, a standalone Veterans and Military Affairs Omnibus Bill was passed by the Minnesota Legislature with nearly unanimous support. Significantly, this law provides funds to assist in housing chronically homeless Veterans so that every Veteran can have a place to call home. It includes a Service Bonus to Minnesota’s Post-9/11 Veterans. It allows the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs to complete three new Minnesota Veterans Homes and operate a new State Veterans Cemetery. I am exceedingly grateful for the overwhelming support for Veterans

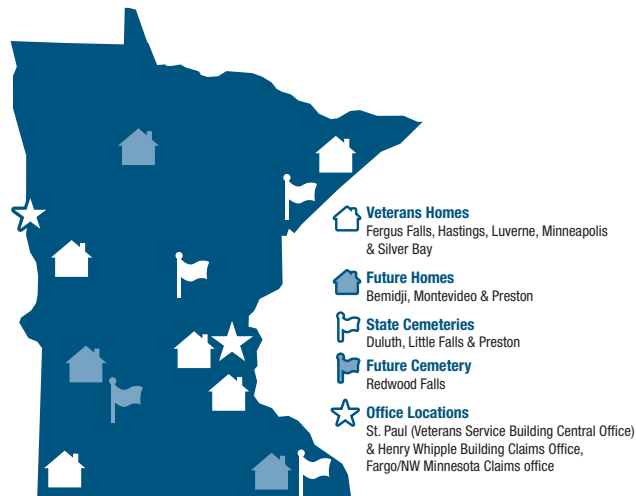
demonstrated by Minnesotans statewide. That commitment ensures MDVA has the resources to continue to honor and serve those who have served our country.”

Mission Statement

Serving Minnesota Veterans, their dependents and survivors by connecting them with the federal and state care and benefits they have earned.

What We Do

The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs runs Minnesota’s five state Veterans Homes, three State Veterans Cemeteries and assists Minnesota’s 304,000 Veterans and their dependents in securing available benefits and services.



Leadership Team

Larry Herke was appointed as the 18th Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) in January 2019. As Commissioner, Herke is charged with leading efforts to serve the state’s 304,000 Veterans and their families. He also represents the Department at hearings before the Minnesota Legislature, collaborates on Veterans issues with Minnesota’s Congressional Delegation and United States Department of Veterans Affairs, and maintains close working relationships with Minnesota’s County Veterans Service Officers and Veterans Service Organizations.

Other MDVA senior leaders and the Legislative team include:

- Brad Lindsay, Deputy Commissioner of Programs & Services
- Douglas Hughes, Deputy Commissioner of Veterans Healthcare
- John Dorin, Senior Administrative Officer
- Ben Johnson, Legislative Director
- Cole Trace, Legislative Liaison

A Snapshot of Minnesota Veterans

Gender



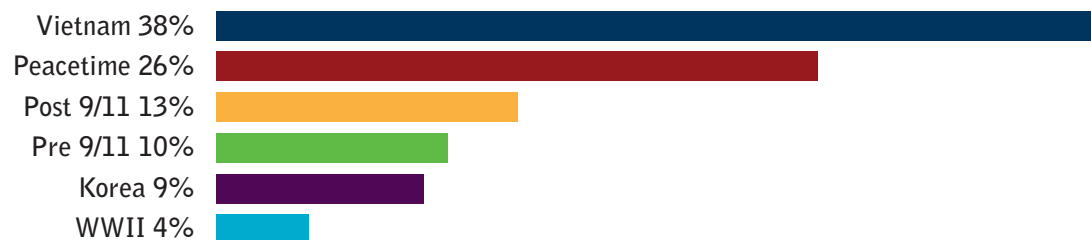
Race



Age



Service



Data as of September 30, 2021

The Minnesota Department of Veteran Affairs partners with federal, state and local agencies; non-profits, corporations and Veterans Service Organizations to ensure the needs of Minnesota’s Veterans and their families are met.

Minnesota’s County Veterans Service Officers (located in each of Minnesota’s 87 counties) work directly with Veterans to assist them and their families in obtaining the benefits they have earned through their military service.



Rep. Rob Ecklund, Chair of the House Labor, Industry, Veterans and Military Affairs committee:

“A Veterans bill should never be a part of the political ping pong that sometimes happens when you have to put that into another omnibus bill.”

“This compromise language is the result of two chairs from different political parties that decided to say to heck with politics, let’s throw that away and let’s sit down and get this done.”

Sen. Andrew Lang, Chair of the Senate Veterans and Military Affairs committee:

“Members, I think the body as a whole, not Republican nor Democrat, nor independent for that matter, could be any prouder to be able to pass a bill such as this. We came together, we worked on it, we agreed on it, we disagreed on it. At the end of the day, we both signed a piece of paper that I had in my hand this morning and it put a smile on my face and it said ‘You know what, we’re going to take care of our Veterans in the state of Minnesota and we’re going to do it today.’ ”

Veterans Omnibus Bill Reflections

By Cole Trace, MDVA Legislative Liaison

After Legislative agreement, Governor Tim Walz signed this bill into law, making a significant positive impact on Minnesota Veterans.

Omnibus Veterans and Military Affairs Finance Bill (Chapter 54—Senate File 4233)

The collective efforts of Minnesota Veterans, supporters and key Legislators resulted in the Minnesota House and Senate passing SF 4233, the first ever Veterans and Military Affairs Omnibus Bill. Governor Tim Walz signed that bill into law as Chapter 54 on May 10, 2022.

This act by elected officials created a new precedent that should be followed in the years to come. For too long at the Capitol, Veterans funding and policy items have been tied into more partisan bills. This put at risk the passage of laws that would help Veterans receive the care, services and benefits that they’ve earned defending our country.

Bills that included the majority of Veterans funding or policy over the last decade.

Year	Name of Bill	Signed into law OR vetoed
2021 Special Session	State Government Finance and Elections Omnibus Bill	Signed into law
2020* Regular Session	Supplemental funding bill included a special COVID relief grant for Veterans.*	Signed into law
2019 Special Session	State Government Finance Omnibus Bill	Signed into law
2018 Regular Session	Omnibus Supplemental Budget Bill	Vetoed
2017 Special Session	State Government Finance Omnibus Bill	Signed into law
2016 Regular Session	Omnibus Supplemental Budget Bill	Signed into law
2015 Regular Session	State Government Finance Omnibus Bill	Signed into law
2014 Regular Session	Omnibus Supplemental Budget Bill	Signed into law
2013 Regular Session	State Government Finance and Veterans Affairs Omnibus Bill	Signed into law

*No supplemental finance bill because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the summary of past bills demonstrates, including Veterans funding and policy in the oftentimes contentious State Government Finance or Omnibus Supplemental Funding Bills greatly jeopardizes timely passage of important funding or law changes on behalf of Veterans.

This year's Veterans and Military Affairs Omnibus Bill showed that these issues can be separated from the partisan process of end-of-session deal making, conference committee negotiations and veto threats unrelated to Veteran-related Legislation. This bill received nearly unanimous support from the Legislature; only one Legislator voted in opposition.

The strongest push for a Veterans and Military Affairs Omnibus Bill came from the Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) which make up the Minnesota Commanders' Task Force (CTF) at the annual "Minnesota Veterans Day on the Hill" rally held at the State Capitol on April 20, 2022. With key Legislators in attendance, speakers representing various Veterans groups including Trent Dilks, DAV Department of Minnesota's Legislative Director, demanded that the Legislature "pass an omnibus bill now!" Prior to the rally, Veterans Service Organizations — led by the Minnesota Disabled American Veterans — made

more than 3,000 contacts to Legislators urging the passage of an omnibus bill. In response to those contacts and the rally, key Legislators got to work.

With that call to action in place, Veterans Committee Chairs in the House and Senate, Representative Rob Ecklund and Senator Andrew Lang respectively, began crafting an agreement on an Omnibus Veterans and Military Affairs Bill. They were assisted by their staff as well as Representative Bob Dettmer and other Legislators. On May 5, 2022, 16 days after the rotunda rally, the bill was unveiled in the Senate Finance Committee. It was deliberated and approved by the committee. Later that afternoon, the full Senate voted on the bill and approved it with a unanimous vote. The House brought the bill up for a vote the next day where it passed 121 to 1.

This bill would not have been possible without the dedication of our state's Veterans and their families and friends who called on Legislators to remove this subject matter from partisan gridlock. Those involved are loudly declaring that a precedent has been set; that this should be the Legislative path to follow in the years ahead.

Cole Trace is MDVA's Legislative Liaison and has worked with the Legislature in various capacities since 2010.

Rep. Bob Dettmer, GOP Lead on the House Veterans Committee, added:

“We did it. We’ve got a standalone Veterans omnibus bill to come to the House floor and the Senate floor for the first time I think in the history of our institution.”... “Together we’ve been able to give a priority to our Veterans and bring a bill to the House floor with just a single issue to serve our Veteran population here in Minnesota.”

Sen. Jerry Newton, Ranking Member on the Senate Veterans Committee, said:

“It’s nice that we’ve got a single bill moving forward rather than being part of a larger omnibus bill. This is important for Veterans, they’ve been asking, and I think a lot of us in the chamber have been receiving emails from Veterans groups and individuals who wanted to have a clean Veterans bill moving forward. We have that.”

2022 Legislative Session Summary

New Funding Items

Post-9/11 Service Bonus

Since World War I, Minnesota has offered a monetary bonus to Veterans for their service in major wars including World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the Persian Gulf War. In fact, Article XIII of the Minnesota Constitution was amended in 1996 to include a section regarding Veterans' bonuses. This year, the Legislature recognized the need to thank service members and appropriated nearly \$25 million for those who served in the United States armed forces during the post-9/11 Global War on Terrorism and wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Gold Star Families will also be eligible for the bonus. More than 48,000 Minnesotans served during these conflicts from September 11, 2001, until combat operations in the Global War on Terror (GWOT) concluded in August 2021. There are also more than 100 Gold Star Families in Minnesota from this period.

Payments for the bonus will be provided to resident Veterans who provided honorable service in the armed forces during the eligibility period, as follows:

- \$600 if the Veteran did not receive the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, Iraq Campaign Medal, or Afghanistan Campaign Medal

- \$1,200 if the Veteran received the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, Iraq Campaign Medal, or Afghanistan Campaign Medal.
- \$2,000 to Veterans' beneficiaries who were eligible for the medals above, but died as a direct result of a service connected injury, disease or condition.
- To be eligible for the bonus, a Veteran must have Minnesota as their home of record at the time they entered into active duty in the armed forces and must currently reside in the state when applying for the bonus.

For more information or to apply for the bonus, visit:

MinnesotaVeteran.org/ServiceBonus

Bill origin: HF 4365 (Sandstede – Hibbing)/SF 4328 (Lang – Olivia)

Minnesota Veterans Cemetery – Redwood Falls Operational Funding

\$830,000 was provided to the MDVA to support the operations and opening of the new Minnesota State Veterans Cemetery in Redwood Falls. The Cemetery is expected to have its first burial in November 2022 and a dedication event in May 2023. Operating costs include employee salaries, utilities, equipment maintenance and

upkeep, fertilizer and fuel. This will be the fourth legislatively authorized State Veterans Cemetery operated by MDVA. The others include Duluth, Little Falls and Preston. All Minnesota Veterans Cemeteries are collaborations in partnership with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' National Cemetery Administration, local communities and MDVA.

Bill origin: HF 4334 (Frederick – Mankato)/SF 4326 (Lang – Olivia)

Expanded Funding Items

Supplemental funding for new State Veterans Homes

Nearly \$27 million was appropriated to the new Veterans Homes under construction in Bemidji, Montevideo and Preston. The funding was largely needed due to initial budget constraints and rising construction costs over the past two years. Each of the projects had to scale back plans to stay under budget. This funding will allow many of those items to be brought back into the projects. One example is an ambulance bay where Residents of the Home can be transferred in a less public entry, sheltered from the elements. The funding will also be used for purchasing the furniture, fixtures and equipment necessary for the Residents to live well at the Homes and to allow staff to provide the highest quality of care to the Residents.

Bill origins: HF 4330 (Davids – Preston)/SF 4181 (Miller – Winona) and HF 4272 (Davids – Preston)/SF 3875 (Lang – Olivia)

Increased Funding for Congressionally Chartered Veterans Service Organizations

The Veterans and Military Affairs Omnibus Bill included an appropriation increase for Minnesota’s Congressionally Chartered Veterans Service Organizations and established a new chapter in state law, Chapter 197.61 — Veterans Service Organizations (VSO) Grant Program – which codified the VSO Grants Program. The program has been in existence since 1945, typically funded as a line item in the biennial appropriations bill. Since 2009, the appropriation had remained at \$353,000 annually. The omnibus bill increased the annual funding for the program to \$500,000 to support the operations and enhance the effectiveness of services to Minnesota Veterans. Past recipients included the American Legion - Department of Minnesota, AMVETS - Department of Minnesota, Disabled American Veterans - Department of Minnesota, Military Order of the Purple Heart - Department of Minnesota, Paralyzed Veterans of America -

Minnesota Chapter, and Veterans of Foreign Wars - Department of Minnesota.

Bill origin: HF 4335 (Edelson – Edina)/SF 4329 (Lang – Olivia)

Increased Funding for County Veterans Service Officers

The omnibus bill also increased the appropriation for County Veterans Service Officers (CVSO) for the first time since 2013. It provided an additional \$450,000, bringing the total available to \$1.55 million. Of that, \$100,000 will be used by the Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers for administrative costs, certification of mandated training and accreditation, and costs associated with reintegration services. The balance will be used for counties throughout the state for the following purposes:

- Provide outreach to the county’s Veterans
- Assist in the reintegration of combat Veterans into society
- Collaborate with other social service agencies, educational institutions and other community organizations for the purposes of enhancing services offered to Veterans
- Reduce homelessness among Veterans

- Enhance the operations of the County Veterans Service Office

CVSOs were formally authorized by the Minnesota Legislature in 1945. In 1978, the Legislature established the requirement for a CVSO in all of Minnesota’s 87 counties. The grant programs for CVSOs were created by the Legislature in 1993, with \$310,000 appropriated “to enable them to enhance the effectiveness of their Veterans Service Offices.”

2022 Legislative Session Summary - continued

Expanded Funding Items

Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans Funding for Veterans Homelessness

The Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans (MACV) received \$5.4 million to support their work toward ending Veteran homelessness in Minnesota. This additional funding must be used for the establishment and management of permanent supportive housing options. MACV provides the following assistance to those on the verge of homelessness:

- Services to maintain housing
- Employment
- Legal issues
- Housing and housing-related costs
- Transportation

The bill also allows former service members to receive support from MACV; previously support was limited to those who were eligible under the status of Veteran as defined by federal law.

Bill origin: HF 4324 (Ecklund – International Falls)/SF 4111 (Lang – Olivia)

Increase Engagement Activities and Temporary Housing

To further push toward ending Veteran homelessness in Minnesota, the Omnibus Bill included \$1.7 million for alternative housing options for homeless Veterans as well as staff to increase outreach efforts to end homelessness. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, homeless Veterans were given temporary shelter in hotels rather than congregate emergency shelters. This allowed for a private space that gave these Veterans time to move past their housing barriers and meet goals to access permanent housing more quickly. Increased outreach efforts will be provided by additional staff who are subject matter experts able to quickly access benefits for homeless Veterans living in hotels, shelters or unsheltered. This will be available for Veterans and former service members, regardless of discharge.

Bill origin: HF 4358 (Ecklund – International Falls)/SF 4175 (Hawj – St. Paul)

Tenancy Support and Landlord Engagement

The Omnibus Bill contained \$1.1 million to fund the Homes for Veterans Program that provides benefits and support for housing the homeless Veterans who often have the highest barriers in finding housing. Over the last two years, the Homes for Veterans Program has assisted more than 120 Veterans with higher housing barriers secure housing through the rental market, with approximately 96% of those Veterans renewing their lease. This funding will be used to increase incentives in three areas that would allow for rental flexibility with high-barrier Veterans: landlord incentives for those willing to rent property to a homeless Veteran, vacancy relief to offset the time it takes a homeless Veteran to complete the application process, and risk mitigation to serve as an insurance policy that goes beyond a security deposit.

Bill origin: HF 4337 (Berg – Burnsville)/SF 4321 (Lang – Olivia)

Policy Items

One of the few changes to be passed into law outside of the Veterans and Military Affairs Omnibus Bill was HF 3001 authored by Representative Bob Dettmer and Senator Bruce Anderson. The bill permits Minnesota residents with prior military service to file their discharge papers, regardless of branch of service, with the county recorder. Previously, the only branches that were recognized in this part of law were the Army, Navy and Marine Corps. The House passed this bill on March 21, 2022 with a vote of 132 to 0. The Senate passed it on May 21, 2022, on a 67 to 0 vote.

Infrastructure Funding Fargo VA Fisher House

The Veterans and Military Affairs Omnibus Bill provided \$500,000 to support the construction and creation of a Fisher House at the Fargo VA Medical Center. Minnesota Veterans make up approximately 33% of enrollees at the Fargo VA. Fisher Houses provide families and caregivers of Veterans temporary accommodations at no cost as the Veterans receive care. There are currently 67 Fisher Houses across the country as well as in the United Kingdom and Germany. In 2021, they served more than 27,000 families with a daily capacity of 1,300 families.

Bill origin: HF 4311 (Keeler – Moorhead)/
SF 4325 (Lang – Olivia)

Veterans Campground on Big Marine Lake - Infrastructure Funding

The Veterans Campground on Big Marine Lake will complete an upgrade on their wastewater infrastructure with a \$774,000 appropriation. The camp, located on Big Marine Lake in Washington County, was founded in 1926 and provides Veterans and their families rest and recreation. The camp has also received funding through MDVA's Support Our Troops grant program.

Bill origin: HF 2864 (Dettmer – Forest Lake)/SF 2863 (Housley – Stillwater)





Serving those who have served.

Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs

20 West 12th Street
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155
651-296-2562
1-888-LinkVet (546-5838)

Benjamin Johnson

Legislative Director
ben.johnson@state.mn.us
651-201-8226

Cole Trace

Legislative Liaison
cole.trace@state.mn.us
651-757-1540