

**Minnesota Veterans of the Special Guerrilla Units and Irregular Forces in Laos Advisory Task
Force
Meeting 8 Summary – January 15, 2026**

Date: January 15, 2026

Time: 2:00 p.m.- 4:00 p.m.

Location: Hybrid Meeting (Microsoft Teams and In-Person)

1. Call to Order

Chair Susan Pha called the meeting to order at 2:04 p.m. and thanked Task Force members and MDVA staff for their time, input, and expertise throughout the Task Force process.

2. Roll Call and Quorum

Vice Chair Ben Johnson conducted roll call. A quorum was confirmed.

3. Opening Remarks

Chair Pha stated that the purpose of the meeting was to conduct a final review of the draft Task Force report and appendices, address any remaining issues, and consider approval of the Task Force's recommendations for submission to the Commissioner of Veterans Affairs.

4. Discussion Topics

4.1 Review of Draft Report and Appendices

MDVA staff reviewed the structure and contents of the draft materials, which included three documents:

- Report to the Minnesota Legislature
- Appendix A – Detailed Meeting Summaries
- Appendix B – Enabling State Legislation and Referenced Federal Law

Staff noted that the report includes a cover letter to the Commissioner, background on the enabling 2025 Session Law, a summary of Task Force work and meetings, technical recommendations from MDVA, and the Task Force's eligibility and verification protocol recommendations. Appendices were noted as being posted on the MDVA website for transparency.

Vice Chair Johnson clarified that the report would be transmitted to the legislative committees of jurisdiction, rather than directly to the full Legislature.

MDVA staff also outlined technical recommendations included in the report that were not related to eligibility criteria, including:

- Inclusion of a burial fee reference related to state veterans' cemeteries (Minn. Stat. § 197.236, subd. 9)
- Updates to veterans' preference statutory citations
- Removal of references to certain benefits that do not align with the new veteran category

No objections were raised to these technical recommendations.

4.2 Revision to Training Certificate Language

Discussion focused on language in the eligibility protocol listing examples of acceptable documentation, specifically references to certificates of training (including from Thailand).

Several members expressed concern that explicitly naming Thailand could be misinterpreted as limiting eligibility or excluding other valid training locations.

Motion:

Chair Pha moved to strike the phrase "including from Thailand" and instead reference certificates of training more generally.

Second: Vice Chair Johnson

Vote: Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

4.3 Veteran Designation Discussion

Rep. Duran raised concerns regarding the distinction between SGU veterans and U.S. armed forces veterans, particularly as it relates to identification and recognition, and suggested that "SGU Veteran" be reflected in benefit designations.

Task Force members discussed potential confusion that could result from using a non-standard designation on driver's licenses or identification cards. Several members noted that consistency with existing veteran designations was important for public recognition and benefit access.

MDVA staff clarified that the statute creates a separate, defined veteran category that is eligible for a limited set of state benefits, but does not create tiers of veterans or override existing veteran preference frameworks.

No motion was made to modify the report language on this issue.

4.4 Eligibility Stringency Clarification

Mr. Walker raised questions regarding whether the state eligibility protocol could be perceived as less stringent than federal processes for U.S. armed forces veterans.

MDVA staff and Task Force members clarified that:

- The protocol applies only to state-administered benefits

- Federal VA determinations are used as a primary pathway
- The Special Consideration process mirrors federal evidentiary standards and is not intended to be less stringent
- The Task Force's charge is limited to defining eligibility for a newly created state veteran category

Chair Pha summarized that the protocol reflects the Task Force's prior discussions and consensus decisions.

5. Adoption of Report and Recommendations

Motion:

Chair Pha moved to approve the Task Force report, including findings, eligibility criteria, and recommendations, for submission by the Commissioner of Veterans Affairs to the Minnesota Legislature.

Second: Vice Chair Johnson

Roll Call Vote:

Member	Vote	Status
Bill Strusinski	Yes	Present
Tou T. Yang	Yes	Present
Gia T. Lee	Yes	Present
Tong Vang	Yes	Present
William F. Roleau	Yes	Present
Sen. Susan Pha	Yes	Present
Ben Johnson	Yes	Present
Scott Walker	No	Present
Rep. Bidal Duran	No	Present
Sen. Jeff Howe	No	Present
Rep. Ethan Cha	—	Absent
Trent Dilks	—	Absent
Stephen (Tim) Kirk	—	Absent

Vote Tally: 7 Yes, 3 No, 3 Absent

Result: Motion passed.

6. Minority Report Discussion

Mr. Walker moved to allow submission of a minority report.

Second: Sen. Howe

Discussion followed regarding the Task Force's statutory charge, timing constraints, and the absence of a reviewed draft minority report. MDVA leadership noted that individual members may submit materials or testimony independently to the Legislature, but that the Task Force was directed to submit a single report.

Voice Vote: Motion failed by majority opposition.

7. Public Comment

No members of the public requested to provide comment, either in person or remotely.

8. Adjournment

Chair Pha adjourned the meeting at 3:11 p.m.
