

DANE COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE

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Joseph T. Parisi
Dane County Executive

Daniel A. Connery
Veterans Service Director

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Dear Dane County Board of Supervisors,

Thank you for allowing me to speak before you today. I have tremendous appreciation for everything the Dane County Board of Supervisors does to enhance the lives of Dane County residents. Additionally, in my years of experience working for Dane County, County leadership has always done an excellent job of valuing the devotion and ongoing efforts of its workforce. Dane County is undoubtedly a model which many Wisconsin counties try to emulate.

In similar fashion, the Dane County Veterans Service Office, or “CVSO,” is a well-respected leader within our state. Our office is often viewed as the flagship office among our peers because of our experience, passion, and dedication to serving Dane County’s military veterans and their families. We strive for equity to ensure our clients are connected to all possible VA benefits at the federal, state, and local levels. Our clients range in age from their 20s to upper 90s. We have LGBTQ veterans, veterans of color, and veterans from various socioeconomic backgrounds. Regardless, we are front-line advocates focused on delivering high quality customer service to everyone we serve. We take great pride in treating people with dignity and respect as we strive to connect veterans and families to benefits they have earned. Working in the CVSO office is very rewarding on many levels.

A significant function of our office is to help veterans file service-connected disability claims and non-service connected pension claims with the VA. A service-connected disability rating is provided when a veteran has been found to have a chronically-disabling condition (illness, injury, or disease) stemming from military service. For example, we file a large number of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) claims for combat veterans or veterans who may have experienced some other sort of in-service trauma. When the VA awards a disability rating to a veteran, he/she may be provided with monthly financial compensation and he/she is eligible to receive cost-free treatment for his/her condition(s) through the VA. Non-service connected pension is a needs-based benefit which is designed to assist some of our more vulnerable veterans. In FY 2019, our office was instrumental in helping Dane County residents to realize more than \$77M in disability compensation and pension benefits through the VA. This is real money going into the pockets of veterans and their survivors in Dane County. Simply put, this money is not only a perpetual boost on the local economy, but it often helps to change the trajectory of the lives of those we serve!

At present, our largest remaining veteran population is our Vietnam veterans. In the past several years, approximately 1/3 of our annual interactions have been with our Vietnam-era veterans, 1/3 with our Gulf War/Post-9/11 veterans, and 1/3 from other eras (WWII, Korea, and Peacetime).

While many of our aging veterans are passing on, the wars following September 11, 2001 have brought great challenges. Our Iraq and Afghanistan veterans have often served multiple deployments. Some return to our community and thrive, while others struggle. Because of this, the ongoing strain on the VA Benefits Administration (VBA) and VA Health Administration (VHA) is immense. Many of our veterans face complex challenges when they return home and for years thereafter. Mental health issues, musculoskeletal injuries, hearing loss, head injuries, and more are very prevalent. PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) are two 'signature wounds' noted in our present day combat veterans. In recent years, there has also been a pointed focus on recognizing and serving survivors of military sexual trauma (MST) so their healing can begin. Opioid addiction and other self-medicating, often due to service-related injuries, is another challenge some of our veterans experience. Because of the aforementioned, some veterans understandably struggle with occupational and social impairment.

Quite sadly, when compared to the general population, veterans are twice as likely to die from suicide. Data in recent years supports that approximately 20 veterans die from suicide daily in the United States. Only 6 of the 20 were connected to the VA for health care and of those 6, only half of them (3) were engaged in mental health treatment. Getting the word out regarding the services available to our veterans is critical!

Ending veteran homelessness and helping veterans access affordable housing is something our office remains mindful of. We partner closely with the VA and WI Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) to identify and cross-refer veterans in need, including being a resource for veterans obtaining housing and residing in veteran-specific units in a variety of rental properties throughout the Madison area. Such will be the case for the Valor on Washington project.

As you can imagine, our veterans service office has no shortage of business; however, far too many veterans are still unaware of their VA benefits. Despite regularly performing community outreach and CVSO staff continually fostering meaningful relationships with veterans, families, and our community partners, creating awareness about our office is never-ending. As previously mentioned, our office takes great pride in serving our veterans and their families. We respect the obstacles many face and we help our clients navigate through the bureaucratic layers on a daily basis. Passion and dedication to serve is ingrained in our staff, as all of our veterans service officers are military veterans as well.

Thank you again for all you do and for taking the time to put us on your agenda this evening. Should you have any follow up questions or other needs please don't hesitate to reach out to me at connery@countyofdane.com or through my direct work number of 608-266-4155. Deputy Veterans Service Director James Quattromani can be also be reached at quattromani.james@countyofdane.com or 608-267-1551.

Respectfully,



Daniel A. Connery
Veterans Service Director