Subject: Letter of Support for Assembly Bill (AB) 2688 - Proposal to Increase Local Assistance Funding in State Budget for County Veterans

Department: Employment and Social Services

Contact: Ken MacKell Phone: 530.552.6566

Meeting Date Requested: May 12, 2020

Regular Agenda ☐ Consent Agenda ☑

Department Summary: (Information provided in this section will be included on the agenda. Attach explanatory memorandum and other background as necessary).

Assemblywoman Sabrina Cervantes recently introduced AB 2688 which seeks to increase local assistance funding for County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) from $5.6 million to $11 million. Senator Bob Archuleta, Chair of Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, is in support of the legislation. CVSOs are local, county employees who play a vital role in serving California’s large and diverse veteran population, helping to link them to necessary benefits and resources. In 2019, CVSOs brought in $458 million in new federal benefits for California veterans and their families. A large number of veterans are unaware that they are eligible for these federal benefits, and CVSOs are often the essential bridge to connecting qualified veterans to these vital resources. CVSOs help veterans navigate the complex application process and benefits.

This investment, whereby CVSOs are able to assist local veterans in obtaining federal funds, has in the past returned approximately $93 into the State’s economy for every $1 the State allocates to CVSOs.

The Department of Employment and Social Services through its Veterans Services Office supports the efforts of Assemblywoman Cervantes and Senator Bob Archuleta and recommends that the Board of Supervisors approve the letter supporting AB 2688.

Fiscal Impact:

None.

Personnel Impact:

Does not apply.

Action Requested:

Approve letter of support and authorize the Chair to sign.

Administrative Office Review: Sang Kim, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer
May 12, 2020

The Honorable Bob Archuleta  
Chair, Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs  
California State Senate  
State Capitol Room 4066  
Sacramento CA, 95814

The Honorable Sabrina Cervantes  
California State Assembly  
State Capitol Room 5164  
Sacramento CA, 95814

Re: Proposal to Increase Local Assistance Funding in State Budget for County Veterans Service Officers (8955-101-0001) - SUPPORT

Dear Senator Archuleta and Assemblywoman Cervantes:

The Butte County Board of Supervisors supports and commends your efforts to increase local assistance funding in the state budget for County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) from the current $5.6 million general fund statewide to $11 million.

CVSOs are local, county employees who are nationally accredited by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) to prepare and file VA claims that connect veterans to their federal benefits, which they earned by virtue of the military service. CVSOs play a vital role in serving California’s large and diverse veteran population, helping to link them to the benefits and resources they need. In 2019, CVSOs brought in $458 million in new federal benefits for California veterans and their families. These monetary benefits are paid directly to the veteran, whereupon they are spent in the local economy on goods and services. VA benefits are complicated to qualify for but can be very beneficial for the veteran. CVSOs are the experts that help veterans navigate this process. By assisting veterans to obtain these federal benefits, it lightens the load on state and local programs such as Medi-Cal.

When veterans qualify for VA benefits, they receive them for the rest of their life and sometimes receive a retroactive payment. Therefore, the $458 million attributed to the work of CVSOs in 2019 is added to the billions of dollars that were qualified for in previous years and are still being paid to veterans. During fiscal years 1995 to 2016, the state appropriated a total of $58.2 million from the General Fund for its share of the cost of the CVSOs. As a result of this investment, CVSOs were able to assist local veterans in obtaining $5.4 billion in new federal monies. This is a return of about $93 brought into the state’s economy for every $1 the state allocates to CVSOs.

CVSOs stand ready to assist with veterans who are experiencing homelessness or are in danger of becoming homeless. Connecting veterans to the appropriate federal VA services, treatment, and cash benefits can often be the difference between being housed and being on the streets.
The number of veteran suicides nationwide continues to rise, and approximately 14 of the 20 veterans who die by suicide each day are not under VA care. In 2017 alone, more than 6,100 veterans died by suicide, an amount nearly equal to the number of service members killed in action in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001. This national public health crisis requires a national approach that meets veterans where they’re located.

A large number of veterans are not aware that they are eligible for these federal benefits, and CVSOs are often the first to inform them about their eligibility. Many of these veterans are living on fixed incomes and may be relying on state and local programs to stay afloat. It is important that we as a society find these veterans and get them their benefits, which are difficult to apply for.

Outreach can be difficult. CVSOs are the bridge to finding the correct benefits for qualified veterans. They link veterans to the appropriate programs within the community and can reduce the stress on veterans by dealing with the VA directly.

Sincerely,

Steve Lambert, Chair
Butte County Board of Supervisors

cc: Honorable Ana Caballero, Chair, Senate Committee on Budget, Subcommittee #4
Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on the Budget
Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs