

# VETERANS ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE OF COOK COUNTY

## ANNUAL REPORT

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December 31, 2020

The Honorable J.B. Pritzker  
Governor of Illinois  
State House Room 207  
Springfield, IL 62706-0001

Dear Governor Pritzker,

I write this letter to you pursuant to the requirements of 330 ILCS 45/8 concerning the FY 2020 Annual Report of Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County, Illinois (VACCC).

The Commissioners and Bureau of Administration are recognized and commended for their ongoing support of this military veteran program.

The VACCC Executive Board Committee and the Military Veterans Organizations are recognized for their dedication and ongoing support. The FY 2020 Veterans Organization include the following:

- American Cares Too
- American Legion Giles Post #87
- American Legion Post # 758
- American Legion Dorie Miller # 915
- American Legion Iwas/Cetwinski # 943
- American Legion Milton Olive # 1932
- AmVets Post #98
- AmVets Post # 247
- Coalition of Veterans Organizations (CVO)
- DAV Verdun Chapter #33
- Filipino American Veterans of IL (FAVI)
- MCL-Burbank Detachment #75
- Montford Point Marine Association #2
- National Women's veterans United #1
- PLAV-Theodore Roosevelt #4
- PLAV-Stanley Barabasz #72
- PVA Vaughn
- Ukrainian American Veterans #32
- Veterans for Unification
- VFW Benjamin O. Davis #311

The office staff includes Willie Mack, Ph.D., Interim Superintendent, Vanessa Meadows, Executive Assistant Assistant/Assistance Coordinator, Peter Bencak, Financial Officer/Assistance Coordinator, Elizabeth Soto, Outreach Coordinator/Assistance Coordinator.

Major accomplishments of the VACCC for the past year include:

- Assisted Veterans and/or dependents [899 males, 84 females] with assistance in the form of rent/mortgage, utilities, food and transportation cards, burial assistance payments. The amount expended totaled approximately \$ 87,846.22;
- Answered, in addition, hundreds of telephone calls to offer application instructions and to offer referral assistance;

- Expanded the outreach programs to include other assistance providers-military related organizations, and civilian agencies: hospitals, funeral directors, and the like;
- Established a social media presence in order to inform the public of the services provided by the VACCC;
- Established a dynamic website in order to inform the public of the services provided by partner assistance providers and the VACCC;
- Established a virtual informational video in order to explain clearly the financial assistance provided by the VACCC;
- Cleared up financial ambiguities with the State, the IRS, and the Cook County Auditor;
- Clarified appropriate working relationships between the office, the Executive Board Committee and the Ratifying Body of the VACCC.

#### Outlook for Fiscal Year 2021

- The VACCC has been servicing veterans for ninety (90) years. However, no entity services veterans after 5 p.m. daily, or on the weekends, or who are blind or infirmed in their homes. In short, there are plenty of opportunities for other entities to provide non-duplicative services to veterans of Cook County;
- The services that veterans receive in Cook County should be comparable to that received in adjacent counties. A survey will be conducted to determine comparability;
- The office of the VACCC needs teleconference capabilities (e.g. Zoom, etc.) in order to communicate visually with citizens, businesses, and veteran-related organizations;
- The VACCC used to have multiple locations in which to serve veterans; now there is only one office. It needs to have locations that conveniently serve elderly and physically challenged veterans in the far north, far west, and far south suburbs of Cook County;
- Staff members of the VACCC no longer receive health benefits (dental, vision, medical), life insurance, or a retirement plan. On average, they are paid far below comparable Cook County employees [Cook County Salary Grades]. Staff members need benefits;
- The VACCC must continue to fight for sufficient funding and appreciates the cooperation that it has received form the Bureau of Administration and Cook County Commissioners.

#### The Mission of the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County:

*To provide honorably discharged indigent veterans who served in the Armed Forces of the United States and their dependents who meet qualifying intake process requirements. The VACCC provides financial and emergency aid to them as appropriate.*

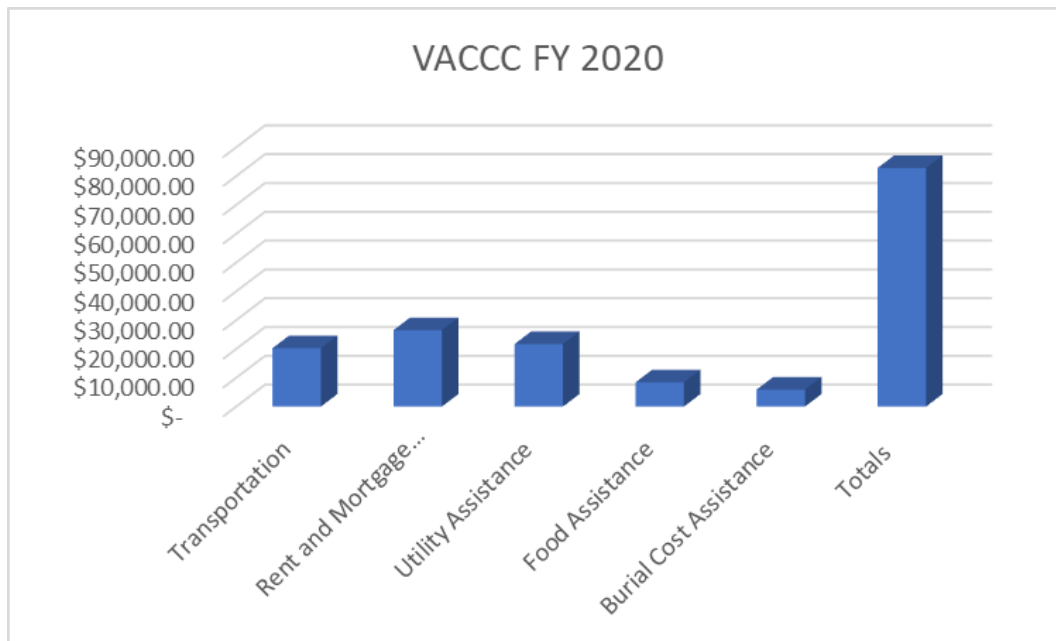
The mission is accomplished primarily by:

1. Direct Provision of Financial and Emergency Assistance
2. Support from Member Veteran Organizations
3. Support from taxpayers via the Cook County Government

#### 1. Direct Provision of Financial and Emergency Assistance

This fiscal year, the Office of the VACCC provided a total of \$ 87,846.22in direct financial and emergency assistance:

• Transportation	\$ 20,279.00
• Rent and Mortgage Assistance	\$ 26,539.49
• Utility Assistance	\$ 21,702.73
• Food Assistance	\$ 8,425.00
• Burial Cost Assistance	\$ 5,900.00
Sub totals	\$87,846.22



The pandemic has impacted the provision of services in many negative ways. However, there is much evidence that the Spring of 2021 will witness a large increase in the need for rental, mortgage, and utility assistance. The Office receives many phone calls from veterans who are afraid to venture out into the contagion. Given this fact, they fear traveling long distances to the solo Office on Hamilton Avenue. Two County Administrations ago, there were VAC Offices located in Maywood, Cicero, Chicago, Chicago Heights, and Harvey. They have been eliminated. In addition, amidst credible threats of defunding, this fiscal year, the VACCC’s budget was slashed from \$635,000 to \$471,000, a thirty-four per cent (34%) decrease.

A recent audit indicates that the VACCC maintains good accounting, record keeping and internal control procedures [County Auditor Internal Audit Report Draft, 2020].

The Interim Superintendent emphasized that the original tax dollars (the sources) that fund the VACCC come from, local, state, and federal taxpayers. The Interim Superintendent functions as a fiduciary distributor of funds.

## 2. Support from Member Veteran Organizations

The term “military veterans’ organizations” ...shall mean those organizations formed by and for military veterans which are chartered by Congress or which are chartered by the State of Illinois with a paid membership of a least 15 and which provide responsible aid, assistance, or services to the veterans community [330 ILCS 45/11].

The membership of the Commission is comprised of one Delegate and one Alternate from each of the legally operating chartered and participating military veteran organization in Cook County. Each organization may include, individual posts, chapters, and detachments of major chartered veteran organizations as described in Illinois Compiled Statutes, Section 45/1-11. These organizations must petition for membership and pay annual dues at the time of application (currently \$20.00) and submit evidence to support the validity of their respective organizations. Membership authorization letters stay on file and are valid for a one-year time period.

No one Delegate or Alternate is permitted to represent or vote on behalf of more than one veteran organization.

The membership has voted to have an executive board of directors, comprised of honorably discharged veterans. Its task is to oversee and approve all operations of the Commission. Currently, elected board officers include a Commander, Senior Vice-Commander, Junior Vice-Commander and Finance Officer. Appointed members include a Judge Advocate, Sergeant-at-Arms, and a Chaplain.

The staff of the Office of the VACCC operates under the direction and supervision of the entire Executive Board Committee. A superintendent is charged with carrying out the daily operations and promoting the various programs and services rendered to eligible veterans. The executive powers of the Commission shall be vested in a superintendent elected by the Commission [330 ILCS 45/10]. The superintendent must have been a member in good standing of the Commission for two consecutive years, have verified management experience in order to be nominated by the Executive Board Committee. Currently, an Executive Assistant/ Assistance Coordinator, Finance Officer/Assistance Coordinator, and Outreach/ Assistance Coordinator also work in the Office of the VACCC.

### 3. Support from Cook County Government

The Cook County Board shall provide funds to the Commission to compensate the Superintendent and his employees in a just manner [330 ILCS 45/10]. Also, in accordance with the Intergovernmental Agreement between the VACCC and the Cook County

Government, the County is expected to:

- A. Provide the VAC with reasonable and adequate office space in a Cook County building or other mutually agreeable location.
- B. Arrange for the VAC Office to be clearly marked as being the Office of the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County.
- C. Provide office supplies, furnishings, computer equipment and software for the provision of assistance of eligible veterans, as included within the approved budget.
- D. Provide general administrative services limited to procurement assistance and IT services for the provision of assistance to eligible veterans, at an additional cost to the VAC not included within the approved budget. Said cost will be determined by BOA in consultation with Budget and Management Services as included within the approved budget.
- E. Maintain the resources provided pursuant to the Intergovernmental Agreement in the same manner and custom as the County maintains all of its administrative office facilities for offices of the separately elected officials of the County.
- F. BOA shall review VAC quarterly reports and provide timely comment of feedback to VAC within fifteen (15) days of receiving the quarterly report.
- G. BOA shall process quarterly payments to VAC as provided in the Agreement.

The VACCC suffered a thirty-four per cent (34%) cut to its next year budget (FY 2021).

We are Veterans helping Veterans!  
Sincerely,

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