

December 30, 2021

The Honorable J.B. Pritzker

Governor of Illinois

State House Room 207

Springfield, IL 62706-0001

Dear Governor Pritzker,

Pursuant to the requirements of 330 ICS 45/8 concerning the FY 2021 Annual Report of the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County (VACCC), Illinois, on behalf of the VACCC, I am submitting this Report.

The VACCC recognizes the Cook County Commissioners and the Bureau of Administration and commend them for their ongoing support of the state mandated VACCC.

We also recognize the military veterans' organizations which united voluntarily to support the VACCC, either all of or part of FY 2021. They include the following:

- 555<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry
- American Cares Too
- American Legion, Giles Post # 87
- American Legion, Dorie Miller #915
- American Legion, Iwas/Cetwinski #943
- American Legion, Portage Park # 183
- American Legion, Tinley Park # 615
- AmVets Post #98
- AmVets Post # 247

- Coalition of Veterans Organizations (CVO)
- Filipino American Veterans of IL (FAVI)
- Montford Point Marine Association #2
- National Women Veterans United #1
- Polish League of American Veterans-Theodore Roosevelt #4
- Polish League of American Veterans-Stanley Barabasz #72
- Ukrainian American Veterans #32
- Veterans for Unification

#### 1. Support from Member Veterans Organizations

##### Membership

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 at least 15 and which provide responsible aid, assistance, and/or services to the veteran community [330 ILCS 45/11].

The membership of the Veterans Assistance Commission is comprised of one Delegate and one Alternate Delegate from each of the legally operating chartered and participating military veteran organization in Cook County. Each organization may include individual posts, chapters, and detachment 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 period.

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

Concerning factions within the VACCC, the Interim Superintendent has to deal with each of them. Illinois State Law indicates: “The executive powers of the commission shall be vested in a superintendent elected by the commission from among those who served in the armed forces of the United States.” [330 ILCS 45/10]. To make a point, although several factions (Republicans, Democrats, progressives, conservatives, etc.) grapple in the United States Congress, no one refers to it as “several Congresses”. Another example is illustrated by the Illinois General Assembly. When over a three-year period, similar factions engaged in infighting to reject a budget, no one referred to it as several General Assemblies. It continued to be referred to as the General Assembly containing several active and disputing factions. By analogy, although several factions exist in the membership and outside of the functions of the Office, it should be described to as one VACCC containing several factions.

There should be no power moves made by anyone designed to repress dissenting viewpoints, which are protected by the United States Constitution.

##### Executive Board Committee

Among others, this committee was created by the VACCC Membership to carry out specific functions as detailed in the VACCC Bylaws. It is a committee that can be managed or dismantled by the Membership. The continuing existence of the VACCC is not dependent on the Executive Board Committee; the reverse is the case; the Executive board Committee is dependent on the VACCC.

The Illinois State Law expressly delineates the relative functions of the Membership and of the Superintendent. Therein is no mention of an executive board committee or any of its (elected or appointed) officers. Therefore, the original intent of the Illinois lawmakers concerning assistance to veterans should be clear to any impartial observer.

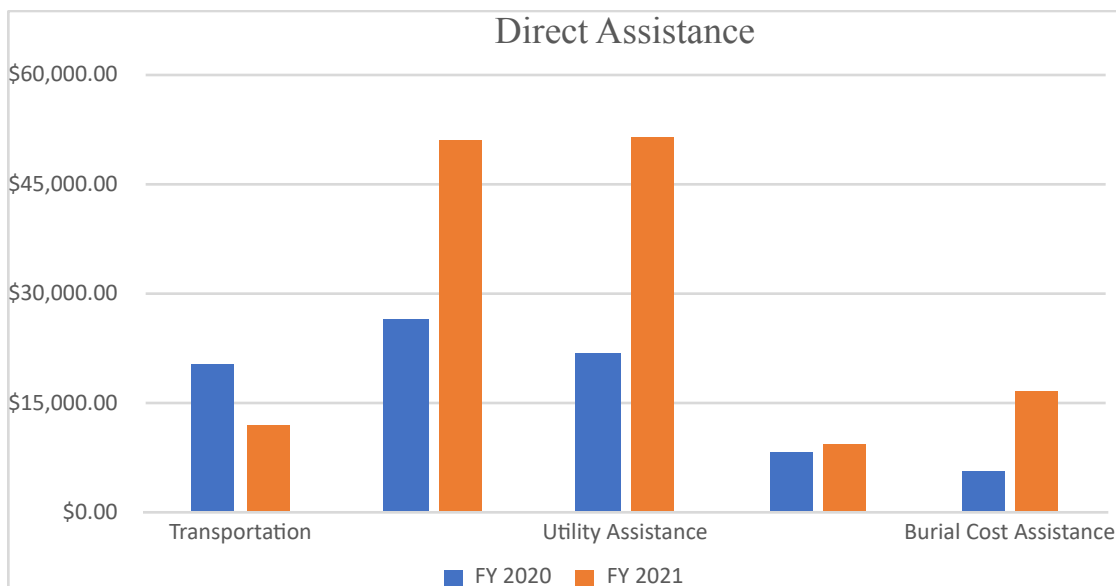
The Office of the VACCC

Per current VACCC Bylaws, the Office operates under the direction and supervision of the entire Executive Board Committee. The executive powers of the Commission shall be vested in a superintendent elected by the Commission [330 ILCS 45/10]. Three other staff members carry out the functions of the Office in an efficient and effective manner.

The COVID pandemic has impacted the provision of assistance in many negative ways. However, veterans venture out to apply in person for rental, mortgage, and utility assistance. Others place hundreds of phone calls to obtain needed prerequisite application information. The VAC Offices formerly located in Maywood, Cicero, Chicago Heights, and Harvey have been eliminated. The current VACCC budget is \$471,000. The current Interim Superintendent stresses the need to function as a fiduciary distributor of the funds coming from local taxpayers.

During FY 2021, the Office of the VACCC provided a total of \$140,605.61 in direct financial and emergency assistance to eligible veterans and their families per State Law:

	FY 2020	FY 2021
Transportation	\$ 20,279.00	\$ 12,004.50
Rent and Mortgage Assistance	\$ 26,539.46	\$ 51,138.15
Utility Assistance	\$ 21,702.73	\$ 51,334.96
Food Assistance	\$ 8,425.00	\$ 9,325.00
Burial Cost Assistance	\$ 5,900.00	\$ 16,803.00
Subtotals	\$ 82,846.19	\$ 140,605.61



## 2. Support from Cook County Government

The Cook County Board is mandated to provide funds to the VACCC to compensate the Superintendent and three other 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:

- Provide the VAC with reasonable and adequate office space in a Cook County building or other mutually agreeable location.
- Arrange for the VAC Office to be clearly marked as being the Office of the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County.
- Provide office supplies, furnishings, computer equipment, and software for the provision of assistance of eligible veterans, as included within the approved budget.
- 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 the Bureau of Administration in consultation with Budget and Management Services as included in the approved budget.
- 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.
- The Bureau of Administration shall review quarterly reports and provide timely comments or feedback to VAC within fifteen (15) days of receiving the quarterly report.
- The Bureau of Administration shall process payments to the VAC as provided in the Agreement.

### Areas in need of improvement or adjustment include, for example:

- The appearance of different legal counsel arrangements between the Cook County State's Attorney and the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County, which are unlike the other VACs in Illinois.
- Lack of consistent communication channels between the Bureau of Administration and the Veteran Assistance Commission of Cook County.
- Lack of transparent disclosure concerning the circumstances surrounding the temporary but *unauthorized* possession of the bank account of the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County by a Superintendent of an adjacent county's VAC.
- Failure to include the VACCC in discussions leading up to an attempted passage of HB 3590, which would have authorized Cook County to have discretion in reimbursing the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County.

### Major accomplishments of the VACCC during the past year include:

- Assistance of veterans and/or dependents [516 males, 76 females], in person, with rent/mortgage, utilities, food and transportation cards, burial financial assistance payments;
- Answered hundreds of telephone calls in order to offer application instructions and to offer referral assistance in each of the preceding areas;
- Reached out to other providers: military related organizations and civilian agencies: hospitals, funeral directors and the like;

- Improved the dynamic website in order to better inform the public; coordinated with the Cook County informational pages and others assistance providers;
- Published a VACCC newsletter to increase awareness of services and important veteran-related events in Cook County;
- Partnered with the American Legion 3<sup>rd</sup> District Service Officer, who has a record of proven success with helping veterans receive their benefits, which include service-connected and non-service-connected disability, discharge upgrades, vocational rehabilitation and appeals;
- Reviewed and implemented the recommendations of the Cook County Audit which covered the period FY 2018 and FY 2019:
  - Perform monthly reconciliation of its bank accounts and resolve outstanding checks;
  - Ensure that reported amounts on quarterly reports are accurate;
  - Reconcile it transportation passes, grocery gift certificates, etc. daily;
  - Enforce policies and ensure proper documentation is in place to support benefits provided to eligible veterans;
  - Expand our policy and manual to include (current) processes not previously included.

#### Outlook for Fiscal Year 2022

- The VACCC expects to demonstrate financial transparency and competency during the next audit which is expected to cover the periods FY 2020 and FY 2021;
- To continue to request that the Bureau of Administration assist other Cook County agencies to provide service to veterans after 5 p.m., and on weekends and who may be home-bound, blind and/or infirmed. In brief, there are plenty of opportunities for other agencies to provide a non-duplicative continuum of services to veterans of Cook County;
- To continue to request that the Bureau of Administration assist in serving elderly and physically challenged veterans who reside in the far north, far west, and far south suburbs of Cook County;
- To continue to request that the Bureau of Administration compare the health benefits (dental, vision, medical), life insurance, and retirement plan of VACCC employees with that of Cook County employees;
- To assist the VACCC to uncover the circumstances surrounding the *unauthorized* seizure of a bank account belonging to the VACCC by a Superintendent of a Veteran Assistance Commission of an adjacent county.
- To continue to insist on the VACCC's appropriate cooperation and the appropriate application of State Law 330 ILCS 45/1-11.

Willie Mack, Ph.D.,

Interim Superintendent,

Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County

