

# VETERANS ASSISTANCE COMMISSION OF COOK COUNTY

## Membership Meeting Minutes

25 March 2024

### Location:

Edward Hines, Jr. VA

5000 5th Ave, Hines, IL 60141

**(Executive Board Members):** Frank Gutierrez (*President*), William Browne (*1st Vice President*), Dutch DeGroot (*2nd Vice President*), Robert Arciola (*Treasurer*).

**At Large Board Members:** Greg Jacobs, Wayne Kern, John Steciw. Non voting **Appointees** Jim Parker (*Secretary*), Kevin Ake (*Chaplain*), Gina A. LoGalbo (*Judge Advocate*), Lorenzo Fiorentino (*Sargent at Arms*). Elizabeth Soto (*Superintendent*)

### I. Welcome – President Gutierrez.

#### a. Call to order at 1915hrs.

Welcome - President Frank Gutierrez

#### b. Roll Call/ Establish Quorum – 2nd VP DeGroot announced a quorum was met.

#### c. Recognition of Guests - President Gutierrez

New Cook Co Dept of Veterans Affairs Director Eric Armstrong was introduced and welcomed. He gave a summary of his background as a third generation Marine and work with the VA.

### II. Opening Reflection - Chaplain Kevin Ake

#### a. Prayer/ Reflection

#### b. Posting of Colors VFW 4th District Color Guard/ Pledge of Allegiance

### III. Consent Agenda - President Gutierrez

#### a. Bill Starr of AL Post 525 moved for the approval of the minutes of the December 17, 2024 Membership Meeting, which motion was seconded and approved by unanimous voice vote.

### IV. Public Comment for Items Not on The Agenda - President Gutierrez

There were none.

### V. Governance Report - Treasurer Robert Arciola

#### a. AL Member Jacobs moved for approval of previous Financial Report showing an account balance of \$5,028.57, which motion was seconded and approved by unanimous voice vote. Treasurer Aricola said the report does not include a \$27 deposit which is pending and the annua IRS Form 990-N has been filed.

#### b. Ratification of Certain Executive Board Actions. Upon a motion by Jim Schultz of AmVets Post 66, duly seconded, this matter was tabled to a future meeting.

### VI. VACCC Report(s) - Superintendent Elizabeth Soto

#### a. FY 2025 Budget: Increased to \$2.8M (applause).

#### b. Digitizing Records: Cook County working on this but we plan to use 3/P vendor.

#### c. New Location: We are working on new space in the Rolling Meadows Courthouse building and in the County-owned 69 West Washington Street office building.

#### d. Direct Assistance: In the 1st Quarter \$128,941.83 was delivered to 700 vets.

#### e. A new gas card program was launched that provided \$100 for services and employment related travel expenses.

- f.** The shuttle bus service has been expanded to include transportation between the VACCC office and several suburban Vet Centers three days per week.
- g.** Outreach: Connor Intress reported that he has attended 35 outreach events since mid-Q4 providing service to 1,135 veterans.
- h.** Operations: Victor Somoza reported that three separate service divisions will be formed, each with its own VSO staff. New suburban partnerships have been formed including the Hoffman Estate's CBOC, Harper College in Palatine, the Frisbie Center in Des Plaines and the VFW building in Niles. He hopes to create a new Claims Management System and have it operational in 2Q. His primary activities since coming on board have been helping vets with Intent to File, POA and Claims forms.
- i.** Art Ellingsen of VFW Post 9284 made a motion to approve the foregoing report, which motion was duly seconded and approved by unanimous voice vote.
- j.** Derek Giffen, VSO, was sworn in as Manager of Veteran Services. He summarized his experience as a VSO with the VA and VFW.

**VII. Bylaws – AL Board Member John Steciw.**

- a.** There are no pending amendments but John will be looking into possible future amendments. Member's suggestions are welcome.

**VIII. Budget – 1st VP William Browne.**

- a.** Nothing substantive to report at this time.

**IX. Services Provided – AL Board Member Wayne Kern Absent**

- a.** No report.

**X. Unfinished Business - President Gutierrez.**

- a.** Membership NFP Status – Secretary Parker  
President Gutierrez announced that this is tabled to a future meeting.
- b.** Updates on Increasing Monetary Assistance & Income Thresholds  
benefits from 300% to 325%. Pursuant to a motion by 1st VP Browne, duly seconded, this was approved by unanimous voice vote.

**XI. New Business - President Gutierrez**

- a.** Review of Attorney Recommendations per email distribution that included documents concerning budget process, procurement, IT security, and personnel policy recommendations. 2nd VP DeGroot moved that the documents be approved, which motion was seconded. Superintendent Soto gave a summary of each recommendation after which the motion was approved by unanimous voice vote.

**b. Election of Board Members:**

- 1.** President Gutierrez asked for nominations for the following positions for the 2025-2026 fiscal year: President, Vice President, 2nd Vice President, Treasurer, 3 board members. The current members listed below were the only nominees. They were approved by unanimous voice vote and accepted their respective nominations.

Frank Gutierrez, **President**

Bill Browne, **1st Vice President**

Dutch DeGroot, **2nd Vice President**

Robert Aricola, **Treasurer**

Greg Jacobs, John Steciw and Jesus Segura, **At-Large Board Members**

- 2.** There being no further nominations from the floor, Pete Hirt Of AL Post 806 moved to close the nominations, which motion was seconded. The motion was approved by unanimous voice vote.

**3.** Pete Hirt moved to elect the above nominees by unanimous voice vote, which motion was seconded and approved by unanimous voice vote.

**c.** Appointment of Additional non-voting Officer/Board Members.

President Elect Gutierrez then appointed the following non-voting Officers as Board Members, which appointments were accepted by the appointees: Secretary Jim Parker, Chaplain Kevin Ake; Judge Advocate Peter Hirt, Sergeant Arms Lorenzo Fiorentino.

**XII.** Good of the Order - President Gutierrez.

**a.** Steve Galvan thanked the VACCC for helping him in his transition from active duty to civilian.

**b.** 2nd VP DeGroot spoke about the importance of opposing SB 2016 and the role of Witness Slips in preventing its passage. Working on training program for this. He is also working on a bill to prohibit schools from denying access to military recruiters.

**XIII.** Future Meeting Sites Update – 2nd VP DeGroot

24 June Propose American Legion Post 1941, 900 S. La Grange Road - La Grange, IL 60525

**XIV.** Comments from Special Guest. CCVA Director Armstrong said that he is looking forward to working with the VACCC in the coming year.

**XV.** Adjournment. Pursuant to a motion by Art Ellingsen, duly seconded, and approved by unanimous voice vote, the meeting was adjourned at 2016hr.

Submitted by *Jim Parker*, Secretary



# VACCC MEMBERSHIP SIGN IN SHEET

## 25 MARCH 2025 MEETING

Sheet 1 of 2

Organization	X	Delegate	X	Alternate Delegate
American Legion 36		Patrick Flannigan		Gregory Jacobs
American Legion 87		Willie Mack		Ashley Shine
American Legion 96		Victor Sarmiento		Eddy Portillo
American Legion 104		Dennis Chavez		Michael F Tuman
American Legion 183		Peter Papuc		Timothy Bodkin
American Legion 208		Greg Padovani		Walter Parus
American Legion 216		Kevin Ake		
American Legion 335		Lorenzo Fiorentino		Chuy Segura
American Legion 478		Beverly Fitch		Nickola Rogers
American Legion 525		William "Bill" Starr		Laura Matuszak
American Legion 615		Ken McClory		John Kaminecki
American Legion 687		Eugene Weaver		Alejandro Segoviano
American Legion 758		Beau D. Butts		Frank Gutierrez
American Legion 806		Al Pizarro		Pete Hirt
American Legion 829		Ray Doeksen		
American Legion 888		Anthony Muro		Andy Anderson
American Legion 923		Clemente E. Rodriguez		
American Legion 943		John Steciw		Adam Bihun
American Legion 973		Eden Puente		
American Legion 974		Anthony Siciliano		Thomas Zito
American Legion 1052		Megan Everett		Brian Phenegar
American Legion 1941		Robert Stoltz		Edward Krzeminski
American Legion 1932		Charles Salley		James McGee Jr.
American Legion 1983		Frank Kelly		Antony (Tony) Thomas
American Legion 1987		Charles Henderson		Ron Bellamy
AMVETS 66		James Schultz		James (Jim) Parker
AMVETS 268		Eddie Brown Jr.		Richard Nielson



# VACCC MEMBERSHIP SIGN IN SHEET

## 25 MARCH 2025 MEETING

Sheet 2 of 2

Organization	X	Delegate	X	Alternate Delegate
DAV Chapter 33		Todd Moore		Joseph J. Donovan
DAV Chapter 84		Kenneth Boor		William Byers
Jewish War Veterans 710		Dr. Jerry Field		Howard Goldstein
Marine Corps L 553		Randall L. Tyner		Paul Zogg
Marine Corps L 1408		George Gandara		Alejandro Morales
Mil Order WW		Zhi Cheng Chen		
MOAA		Mike Peck		Dean Farr
Navy League 69		Leo Alicea		
PVA Vaughan		Robert Arciola		Robert Statam
Polish Legion 72		David Piecuch		
VFW Post 311		Bill Browne		Aretha Spurlock
VFW Post 981		Stewart Abbink		Larry Blieski
VFW Post 1337		Wayne K. Kern		John "Dutch" DeGroot
VFW Post 2202		John Healy		Joseph Wein
VFW Post 2868		Eric Morales		Evamarie Duff
VFW Post 2978		Ray Doeksen		Scott Frit
VFW Post 3579		Ramon Prieto		Keith Renner
VFW Post 5079		Antonio Munoz IV		
VFW Post 5151		Phil "Chappy" Ferrer		
VFW Post 5979		Richard Wojewnik		David Ruiz
VFW Post 7186		Thomas J. "Jim" Hughes		Jason Kruger
VFW Post 8322		Paul J. Bezazian		Paul Knudtson
VFW Post 9284		Arthur J. Ellingsen		Wallace Campbell
VFW Post 10778		Chuck Bosko		
VVA 242		Kevin Calkins		John Andres
SFA 37		Patrick Crimmins		Pending State Charter
40 present of 52				





VACCC FY2025  
1<sup>ST</sup> Quarter Report

March 24, 2025  
Superintendent Elizabeth D. Soto

MISSION

FINANCIALS

DIGITIZATION  
INITIATIVE

NEW SERVICES

NEW LOCATIONS

OUTREACH  
DEPARTMENT

VSO DEPARTMENT

OFFICE

*"...for the just, necessary, and  
needed assistance and  
services of military Veterans,  
who served in the Armed  
Forces of the United States..."*

Veterans and Service Members (330 ILCS 45/) Military  
Veterans Assistance Act







PUBLIC DEFENDER  
MULTIPLE DEFENDANT DIV.  
VETERANS ASSISTANCE  
COMMISSION

VETERANS ASSISTANCE  
COMMISSION OF  
COOK COUNTY

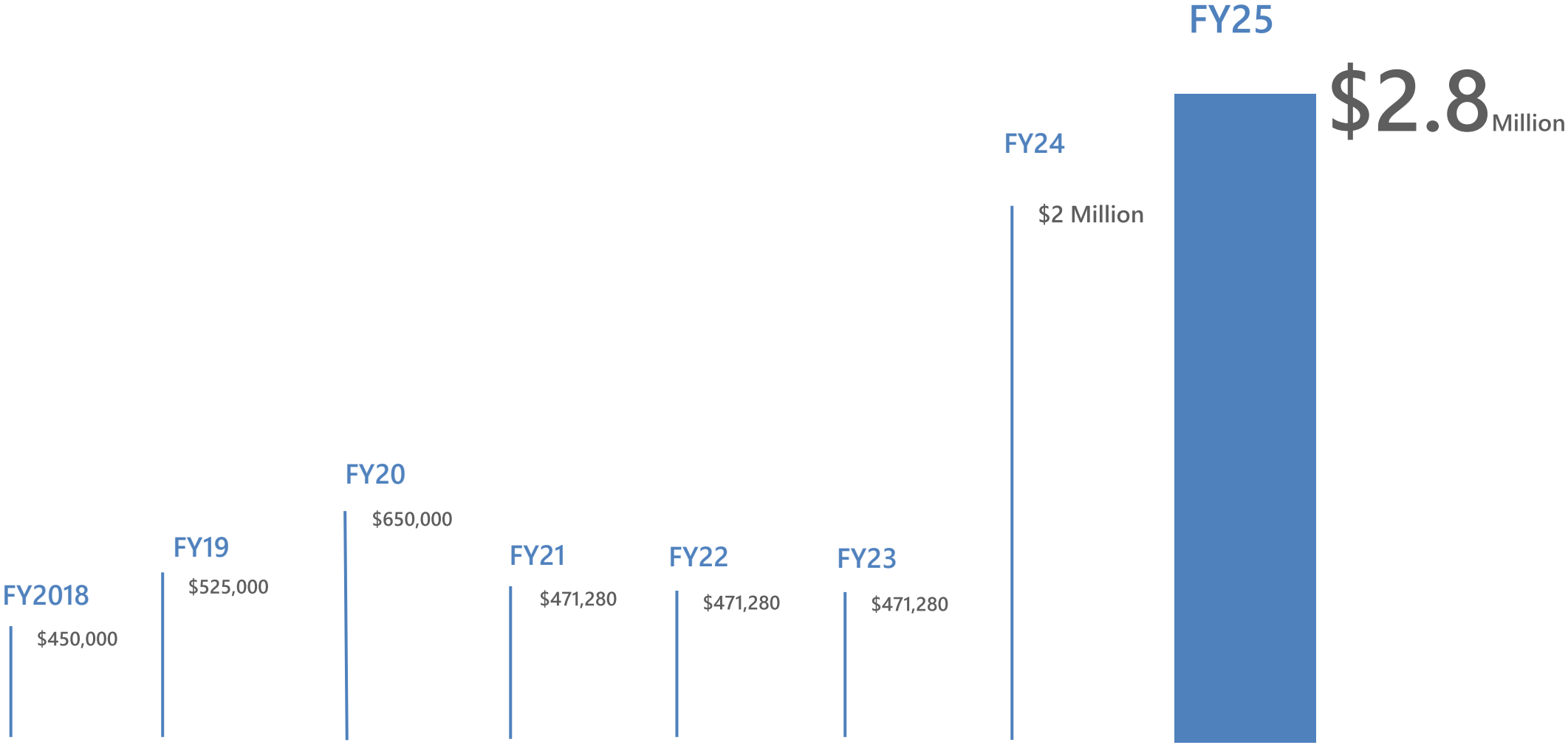
OPEN

SOCIAL DISTANCING  
DO YOUR BIT AND HELP US ALL  
STAY HEALTHY

FY25 Financials



# 7-Year Look Back Budget



# FY25 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Report

SPECIAL PROGRAMS	DECEMBER 2024	JANUARY 2025	FEBRUARY 2025	1st QTR FY 2025 ACTUAL	VS	1st QTR FY 2025 BUDGET
521313 - Special or Coop Programs (Veteran Disbursements)	\$ 50,858.95	\$ 38,364.11	\$ 39,718.77	\$ 128,941.83		\$ 116,367.03
<b>SUBTOTAL: SPECIAL PROGRAMS</b>	<b>\$ 50,858.95</b>	<b>\$ 38,364.11</b>	<b>\$ 39,718.77</b>	<b>\$ 128,941.83</b>		<b>\$ 116,367.03</b>

OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE	DECEMBER 2024	JANUARY 2025	FEBRUARY 2025	1st QTR FY 2025 ACTUAL	VS	1st QTR FY 2025 BUDGET
501790-Prof /Tech Membership Fees		\$ 250.00	\$ 600.00	\$ 850.00		\$ 500.01
501805-Training Program Staff			\$ 1,500.00	\$ 1,500.00		\$ 3,124.98
501836-Transportation and Travel Expenses	\$ 88.90	\$ 748.33	\$ 324.55	\$ 1,161.78		\$ 4,850.07
520150-Communication Services	\$ 4,062.82			\$ 4,062.82		\$ 1,015.71
520260-Postage				\$ -		\$ 485.04
520490-External Graphics and Reproduction Services		\$ 713.86		\$ 713.86		\$ 3,055.56
520830-Professional Services	\$ 5,896.86	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 375.20	\$ 36,272.06		\$ 140,099.43
521054-Legal Services	\$ 4,614.00	\$ 6,153.00	\$ 4,798.00	\$ 15,565.00		\$ 6,249.99
530605-Office Supplies	\$ 2,176.10	\$ 2,215.19	\$ 1,359.13	\$ 5,750.42		\$ 4,829.97
540130-Maintenance and Subscription Services	\$ 174.01			\$ 174.01		\$ 674.01
Bank Fees - Amalgamated Bank	\$ 72.40	\$ 66.99	\$ 37.46	\$ 176.85		
Other		\$ 738.41				
<b>SUBTOTAL: OPERATIONS &amp; MAINTENANCE</b>	<b>\$ 17,085.09</b>	<b>\$ 40,885.78</b>	<b>\$ 8,994.34</b>	<b>\$ 66,226.80</b>		<b>\$ 164,884.77</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 90,104.71</b>	<b>\$ 138,340.79</b>	<b>\$ 99,860.34</b>	<b>\$ 328,305.84</b>		<b>\$ 533,818.46</b>

AGENCY STATISTICS FY2025	DECEMBER 2024	JANUARY 2025	FEBRUARY 2025	TOTAL
Veterans In Office Visits	243	237	220	700
Calls Handled	200	407	365	972
Outreach Events	6	8	11	25



**FY25 DIGITIZATION INITIATIVE**





FY25 NEW SERVICES

# FY25 NEW SERVICES

## 1<sup>st</sup> QTR Gas Card Assistance



**COOK COUNTY**  
**GOVERNMENT**

**Elizabeth D. Soto**  
Superintendent  
(312) 433-6012  
elizabeth.soto2@cookcountyil.gov

1100 S. Hamilton Ave.  
Suite, C-011 (Lower Level)  
Chicago, Illinois 60612

**TONI PRECKWINKLE**  
President  
Cook County Board  
of Commissioners

**TARA STAMPS**  
1st District

**VACANT**  
2nd District

**BILL LOWRY**  
3rd District

**STANLEY MOORE**  
4th District

**MONICA GORDON**  
5th District

**DONNA MILLER**  
6th District

**ALMA E. ANAYA**  
7th District

**ANTHONY QUEZADA**  
8th District

**MAGGIE TREVOR**  
9th District

**BRIDGET GAINER**  
10th District

**JOHN P. DALEY**  
11th District

**BRIDGET DEGENEN**  
12th District

**JOSINA MORITA**  
13th District

**SCOTT R. BRITTON**  
14th District

**KEVIN B. MORRISON**  
15th District

**FRANK J. AGUILAR**  
16th District

**SEAN M. MORRISON**  
17th District

**DATE:** 3/24/2025

**TO:** Cook County Veteran Community

**FROM:** Elizabeth D. Soto  
Superintendent

**RE:** Introduction of a New Service Benefit at the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County (VACCC)

1. Effective March 24, 2025. The VACCC will now provide "Vehicle Gas Cards" as a new service benefit for eligible Cook County Veterans
2. Each Vehicle Gas Card will be endowed with a value of \$100.00
3. This initiative aims to ensure that Veterans in Cook County who own vehicles or live in areas with limited access to public transportation have the necessary fuel support, eliminating any barriers to essential travel and services.
4. The following additional documents are required from the Veteran at the time of application:
  - Valid State of Illinois Driver's License
  - Current Car Insurance
  - Current medical appointment list from a health care provider/facility
  - or Current school enrollment schedule
  - or Current Employment schedule
5. Gas cards are intended solely for the purchase of fuel at Shell gas stations throughout Cook County and cannot be exchanged for cash or used for any other purpose.
6. The number of Shell Gas cards available may be limited based on funding, and distribution is subject to availability.
7. Any attempt to falsify documentation or misuse the program will result in disqualification from receiving future assistance.
8. References.
  - a) Military Veterans Assistance Act (MVAA 330 ILCS 45/2)
  - b) VACCC FY25 Budget Proposal
9. The point of contact regarding any inquiries for this memorandum is the VACCC Superintendent at (312) 433-6012.

Sincerely,

  
www.cookcountyil.gov





## A-List Transportation Assistance Program



**COOK**  
VETERANS ASSISTANCE  
COMMISSION OF COOK COUNTY

# SHUTTLE SERVICES

VACCC ASSISTANCE

- Rental and Mortgage Assistance ✓
- Transportation Services ✓
- Hygiene Assistance ✓
- Records Request ✓
- Food Assistance ✓
- Burial Costs ✓
- Utilities ✓

**SHUTTLE ARRIVAL  
AND DEPARTURE  
TIMES**

**Contact Us**

Phone Number  
**312.433.6010**

Website  
<https://vaccocounty.org>





**FY25 NEW VACCC LOCATIONS**

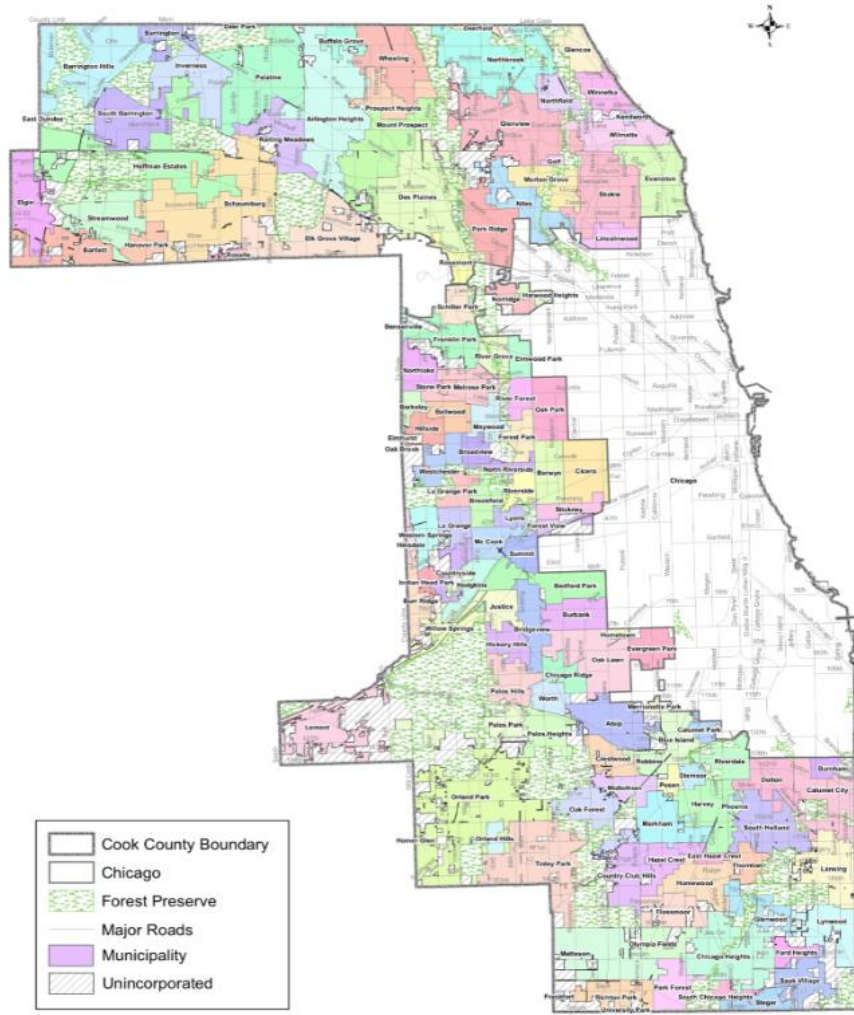
# CONGRESSIONAL PROJECT FUNDING REQUEST





# NEW COOK COUNTY OFFICE LOCATIONS

Municipalities  
Cook County, IL



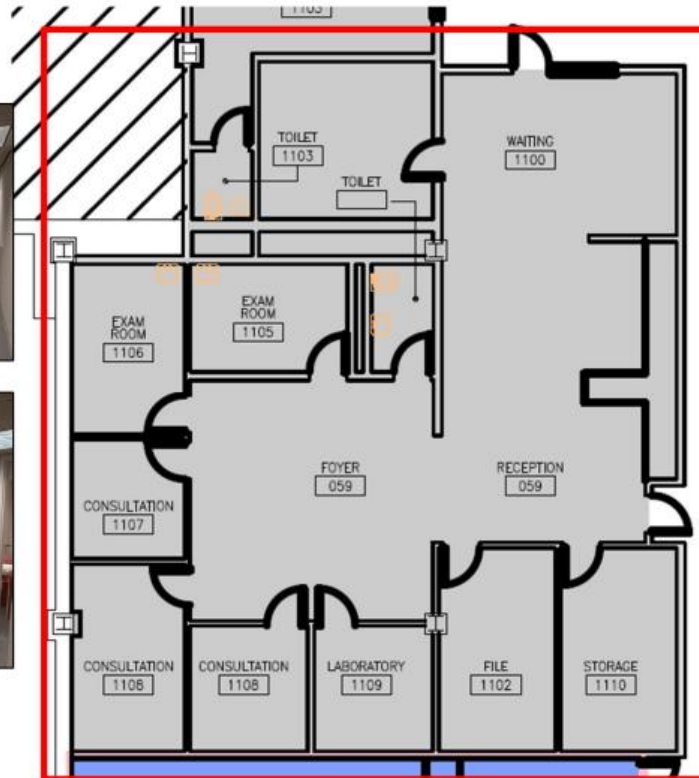
❖ Cook County Rolling Meadows Courthouse

❖ George W. Dunne Building, 14<sup>th</sup> Fl.



# SR-520: VACCC

Rolling Meadows Courthouse, LL Suite #059

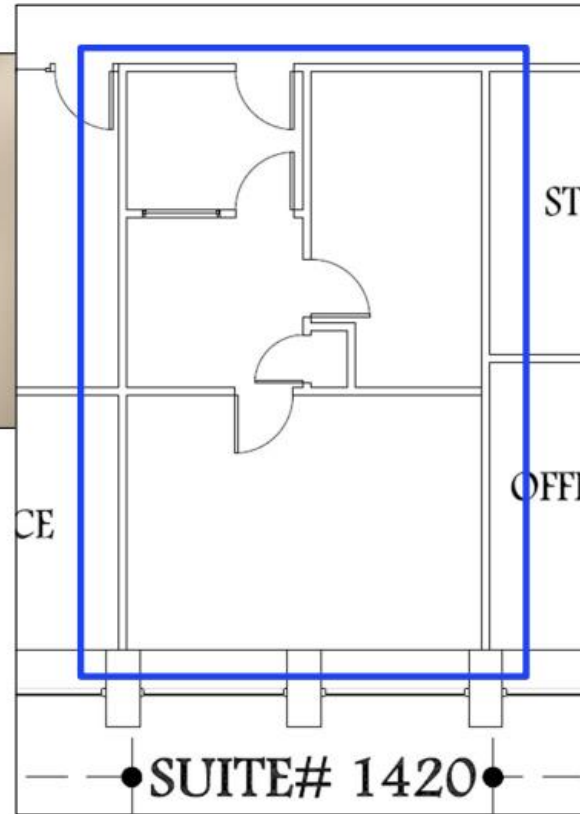
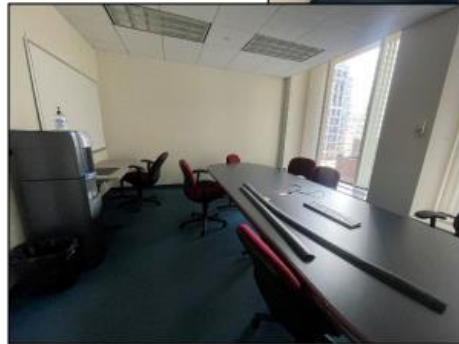


## Features:

- 2,498 SF
- Existing reception area
- Needs renovation to create a conference room and suitable sized offices.
- Could potentially be demised into two smaller suites for two user groups.

# SR-520: VACCC

Dunne Admin. Bldg., 14<sup>th</sup> Floor



## Features:

- 597 SF
- Existing reception area with window
- 1 private office
- 1 workstation space
- 1 large conference room





# Outreach Department Quarterly Report





## Outreach Department Mission Statement

The goal of the VACCC's Communications and Outreach team is to magnify and amplify these services to both the public and to major stakeholders in the Cook County Veteran community.

# Strategic Objectives FY25

- *Consistently attend and/or organize outreach events throughout the county*
- *Increase the visibility of the organization via social media platforms*
- *Engage with elected officials, agencies, and Veteran organizations to build lasting symbiotic partnerships to utilize their networks and spread our message*

# FY25 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Report

Description	Data
Events Attended	35
Veterans Interacted	1,135
VACCC Events Executed	4

## Primary Quarter Goals Accomplished

- Host two VA Housing Education Events
- Attend a minimum of 12 to 24 outreach events
- Redesign VACCC primary flier
- Establish communication and rapport with primary elected officials in Cook County (Cook County Commissioners)

## Primary Quarter Goals *Not* Accomplished

- Host Veteran Education/Job Training Event
- Initiate first weekly/bi-weekly newsletter
- Establish communication and rapport with primary elected officials in Cook County (Alderman, State Elected Officials, Federal Elected Officials)





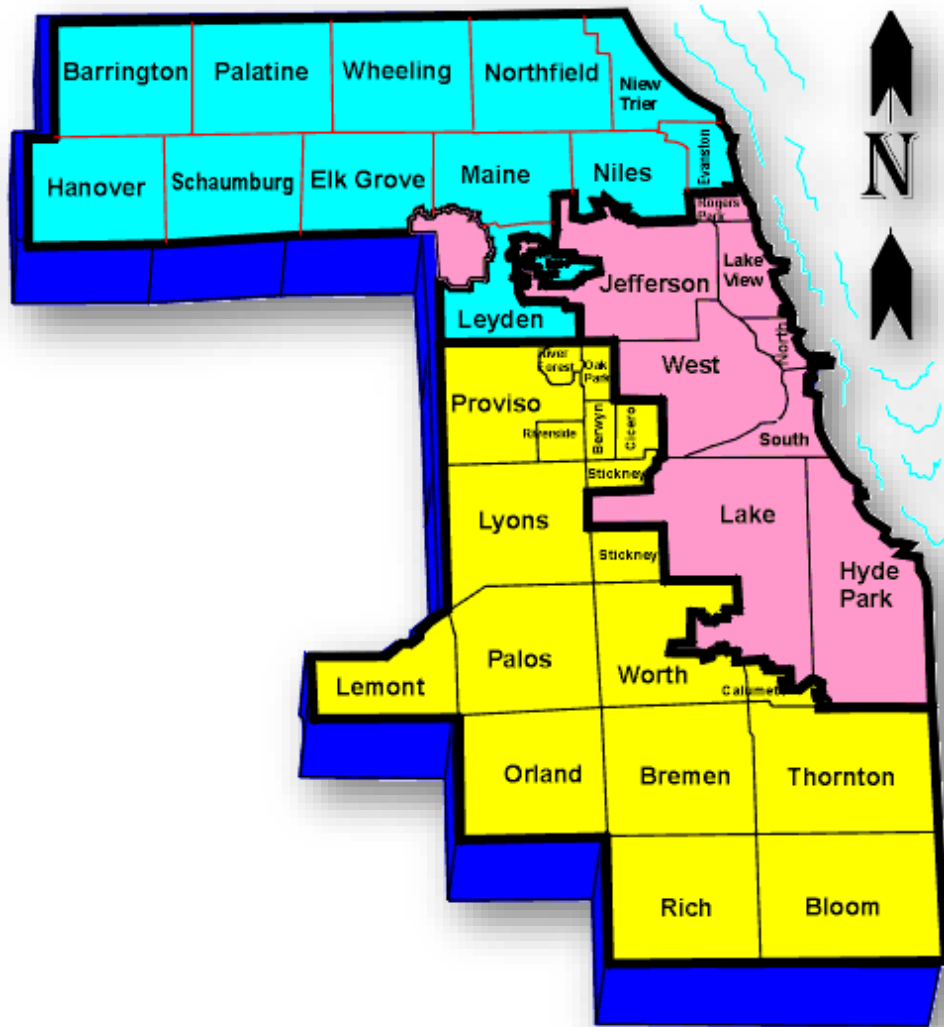
# FY25 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter Goals

## Department Updates and Future Initiatives

- Planning to onboard new team member
- Currently committed to 13 events for 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter
- Developing new pamphlet and flier roll out with updates on VSO Program Services and new gas card initiative
- Planning a updates and redesign for VACCC website and online platform (Facebook)

## Primary Quarter Goals

- Host VA Claims Event
- Host two VA Housing Education Events
- Attend a minimum of 12 to 24 outreach events
- Create VACCC X, Instagram, and LinkedIn profiles
- Finalize Standard Operating Procedures for Communications and Outreach Team
- Host Bi-Annual Stakeholders Meeting
- Initiate first weekly/bi-weekly newsletter
- Establish communication and rapport with primary elected officials in Cook County (Alderman, State Elected Officials, Federal Elected Officials)



# Veteran Service Officer Department



# FY25 Veteran Service Officer Program



**Division 1 – North/Northwest Suburbs**

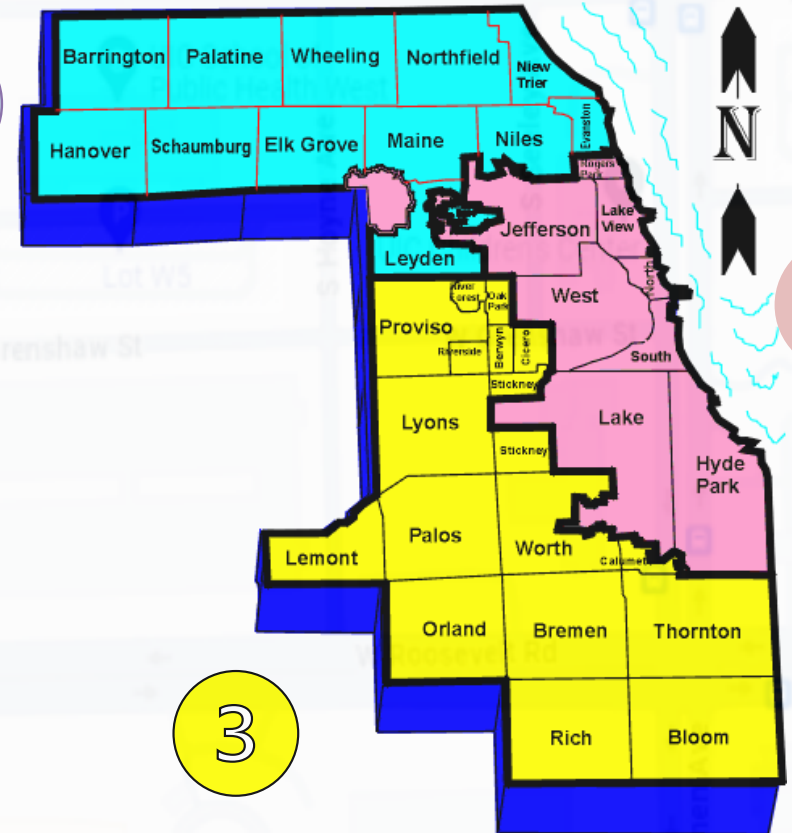


**Division 2 – City of Chicago**



**Division 3 – South/Southwest Suburbs**

1



2

3

VA



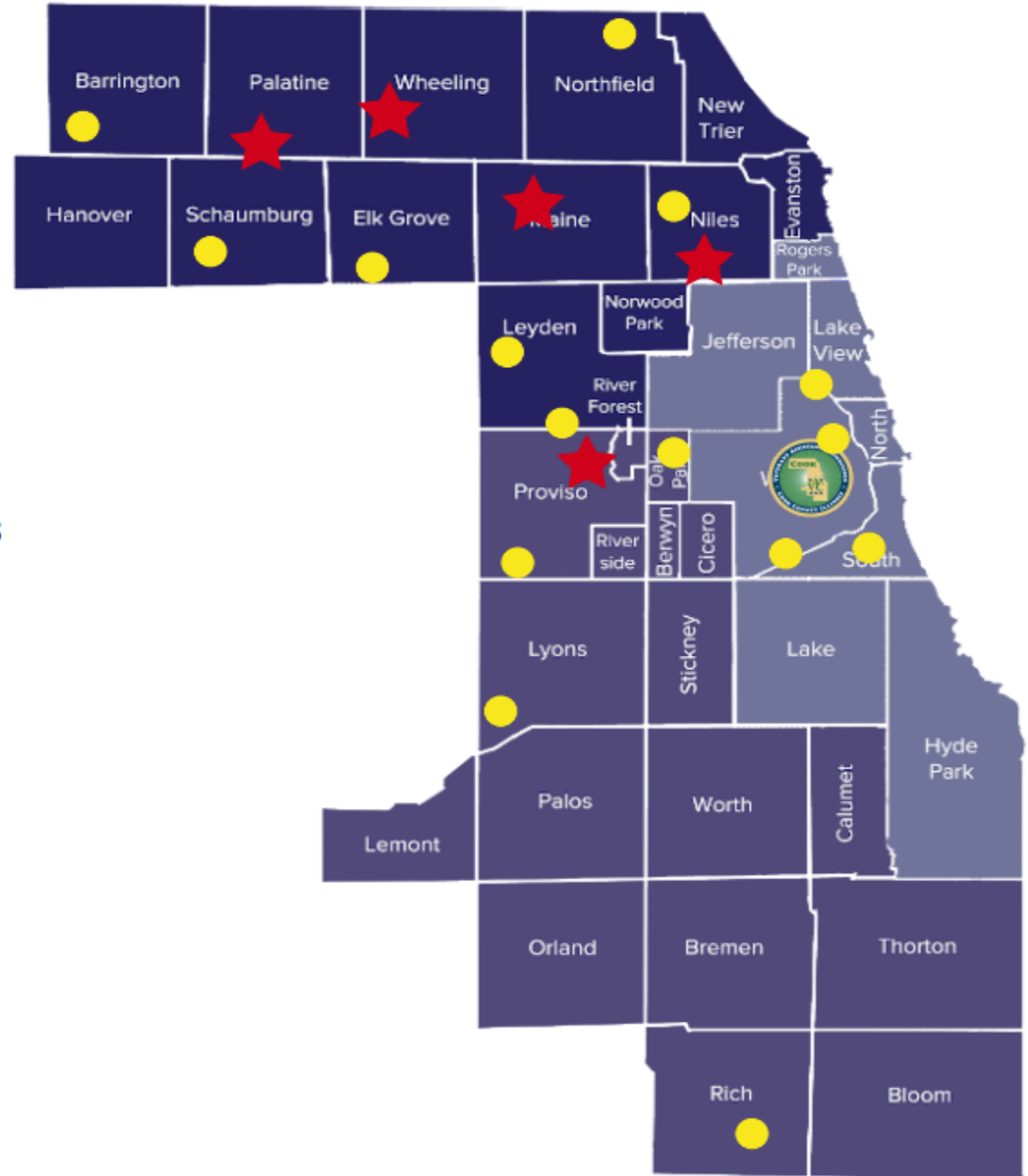
U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health  
Administration



VFW Niles Post 3579



VSO Outreach Events



# CLAIMS

Intent to File	24	Community Partnerships	5
POA	22	VSO Outreach	15
DIC	1		

MONTH	VA FORM 0966	VA FORM 21-22	VA FORM 534EZ
December 2024	0	0	0
January 2025	5	5	1
February 2025	19	17	0



# The Office

## Administrative Assistant IV

**Vanessa Meadows**

Spouse of an Army Veteran

## Veterans Service Caseworker

**Peter Bencak**

Army National Guard Veteran

## Veteran Service Officer

**Victor Somoza**

Army Veteran

## Manager, Finance and Business Operations

**Rajeev Samuel**

## Superintendent

**Elizabeth D. Soto**

Army National Guard Veteran

## Communications and Outreach Coordinator

**Conner Intress**

Army National Guard Veteran



## Deputy Superintendent

**Grant Jacobson**

Army Veteran



## Manager, Veteran Services

**Derrick Giffin**

Army Veteran

Local Community

Local Government

Local Veterans

Working Together to Serve

Those Who Served Us



## ADDRESS

1100 S. Hamilton Ave.  
Suite, C-O11  
(Lower Level of the JTDC Building)  
Chicago, IL. 60612

## CONTACT

Main Phone: 312. 433. 6010  
Fax: 312.433. 6015  
Email: [vacc@cookcountyil.gov](mailto:vacc@cookcountyil.gov)  
Website: [vacccookcounty.org](http://vacccookcounty.org)

