



MONTHLY MUSTER

OCTOBER 2025

VACCC PARTNERS WITH LOCAL LEADERS TO BRING VETERAN HOUSING EDUCATION TO THE COMMUNITY

The VACCC was honored to participate in the Veteran Housing Summit hosted by Cook County Commissioner Kevin Morrison (15th District), alongside State Representative Fred Crespo, Hanover Township Assessor's Office, and State Senator Cristina Castro.

This event brought essential education directly to Veterans - empowering them with the knowledge needed to improve their financial stability, understand VA home loan benefits, navigate property tax savings, and even take the first steps toward purchasing their own home.

By bringing education into the community rather than expecting Veterans to come to us, we are continuing our mission to support the whole Veteran - financially, emotionally, and through long-term stability and homeownership opportunities.

We extend our sincere thanks to Commissioner Kevin Morrison, Representative Fred Crespo, Senator Cristina Castro, Hanover Township,

and all our partners for their leadership and commitment to those who served. The VACCC remains ready to continue working alongside our elected officials and community partners to ensure Veterans receive not only the benefits they've earned, but the tools to build a secure future for themselves and their families.



VACCC



Veterans Assistance Commission
Cook County

MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE BOARD

OCTOBER 2025

As we move toward the end of the fiscal year, I want to take a moment to reflect on the progress we've made and the work still ahead. Earlier this month, I was in Springfield at the start of the veto session, meeting with legislators to talk about the importance of public transit for Veterans, not just as transportation, but as a bridge to education, healthcare, and employment.

We also discussed Veteran hiring initiatives and the importance of creating pathways for Veterans to find meaningful careers, along

with the economic of doing business with Veteran-owned companies. Supporting these priorities strengthens our communities and keeps opportunity here in Illinois.

Soon after, I spoke before the Cook County Board of Commissioners during our evening budget hearing, thanks to Commissioner Donna Miller, where I emphasized that nothing is more important or economically sound for our County government than providing the Veterans Assistance

Commission of Cook County with the resources we need to continue raising the bar for Veteran service. I want to thank the Executive Board members and members of the VAC membership who attended the daytime budget hearings to show their support. The work we do as membership, as the executive board, and as the office has a real and lasting impact on Veterans' lives, and in many cases, it can save lives.

This fall marks two important milestones for our military community. Last month, we celebrated the 250th birthday of the United States Navy (October 13, 1775), and this month we honor the 250th birthday of the United States Marine Corps (November 10, 1775).



FRANK GUITIERREZ
PRESIDENT

MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE BOARD

OCTOBER 2025

Both branches represent the courage, discipline, and sense of duty that continue to define our nation's service members. I hope our membership takes a moment to enjoy the celebrations, and I also want to encourage our office team to take a little time to enjoy them with your families, you've earned it.

For those Veterans seeking employment, the Chicago Transit Authority is celebrating ten years of its Veteran Employee Resource Group and continues to be one of the region's leading employers for Veterans.

I encourage any Veteran who is a job seeker to explore opportunities with CTA, an organization that truly values the skills, leadership, and service experience veterans bring to the workforce.

Looking ahead, our focus remains on building for the future. We'll be continuing the work of the Bylaws Committee and the Services Provided Committee, both essential to our long-term growth and governance. We're also moving to revive, restructure, and rebrand our 501(c)(3) to expand partnerships and strengthen fundraising

efforts going into 2026. Another key goal will be to prepare for a strong membership drive at the start of the new year, ensuring we bring as many Veteran organizations into our network as possible before the close of the registration window.

Thank you again to every delegate, alternate, and staff member for the time and energy you bring to this mission. Together, we're proving that Cook County can continue to lead the way in what veteran service and advocacy should look like, not just locally, but across the nation.



FRANK GUITIERREZ
PRESIDENT

MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE BOARD

OCTOBER 2025

The progress of the VACCC for FY 2025 has been outstanding and kudos to the staff and board all working together to conduct the mission of the VACCC. The VACCC has delivered an outstanding year of service, setting new benchmarks for outreach, and services to the veterans and families.

As the quarterly reports have shown, VAC has created more services for the veterans, the opening of new office locations in Cook County, and expanded their outreach to Hines Hospital with transportation services. The use of a new QR code-based intake system that shows up on the VACCC literature, business cards, and resource booklet has resulted in more individuals requesting services. The outreach team has dramatically increased its engagement and service to all parts of Cook County, and the VACCC has offered technological education to veterans.

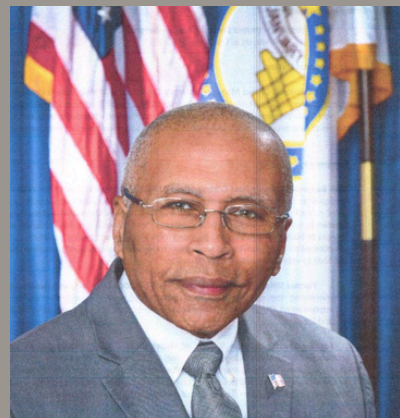
The veteran service officer program has increased to all parts of Cook County.

It is important to be able to go where the veterans are available and accessible. I had an opportunity to attend the Cook County budget hearing and met many of the department heads and county commissioners. VACCC has set up a good working relationship with the Cook County board. The VACCC has shown proof of what they have accomplished in Cook County. This collaboration is good for all the veterans. It has been a long process but the fruits of all the labor of the VACCC staff, board and cook county staff and county commissioners working together is paying off for all veterans and families in need.

It shows that when the VACCC works within the local communities, the local government in the city and suburbs, and local veterans; it comes down to all working together to serve the veterans and their families. My heartfelt congratulations on a successful FY 2025 – the VACCC team, you have truly accomplished a lot this year. Wishing all the VACCC team and board all the best and hoping FY 2026 brings even greater achievements for the VACCC team and board.

BILL BROWNE

VICE PRESIDENT



MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE BOARD

OCTOBER 2025

This October, our focus has been on the upcoming VACCC budget for 2026. Our staff originally put together a budget of around 5 million dollars. The budget departments of Cook County had countered with 3.2 million, an increase from FY26.

Our hope is that the final budget will be more. I was happy to testify 9 October and asked for additional funds. We were fortunate that at a follow-up meeting, we had more of our membership testify. The video is online <https://cook-county.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>

The funds are needed for staff to expand our mission of helping those veterans in need, as well as to bring in accredited veterans service officers VSO's to process claims. These claims bring in much-needed federal dollars into our county.

These dollars are again taxed when spent, and there is a domino effect that some say can be 4-5 times the original award. These of course, are taxed; these taxes, in the long run, actually make up the cost of what we get for our budget. It's a win-win.

For November, it is a busy time for our community. My post in Mount Prospect is very active, we shall have around 20 different events, mostly at local schools. I plan on being at every one of these events. Educating our young citizens should be one of our priorities.

The next endeavor of your board is to make sure that we have a productive meeting on 16 December. I have contacted some organizations that have not been taking their responsibilities to our veteran community by not having their delegate/alternate attend meetings. It's simple: don't apply for membership if your delegate cannot attend. That is why we have an alternate.



DUTCH DEGROOT
2nd PRESIDENT

MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE BOARD

OCTOBER 2025

As Treasurer of the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County (VACCC), my role is to ensure that our membership finances and reports are secure, accurate, kept in order, properly submitted, and serve as a voting member on the VACCC Executive Board. As a Board Member, I am honored to help provide insight on matters, question, support, and advise our Supervisor and her exceptional team of staff members. I am deeply proud of our commitment, collaboration, and accomplishments reflecting the changes to improving the lives of Veterans and their families across Cook County.

Over the past month, our Superintendent and staff provided an update on the status of accomplishments over the past Quarter and our Budget submission at the Membership Meeting and Executive Board Meeting, which I attended. I was elated to see the attendance of Delegates and Alternates. When I returned to the VAC to help restore and save her, we only had a tiny handful in attendance, but this really changed, as has our ability to reach so many more Cook County Veterans!

As an Executive Board member of our VAC, it's imperative we continue to keep ourselves well informed, gain knowledge, provide insight, and make proper decisions. VACCC Members must keep coming to our meetings, and assisting where needed even if it's to vote or offer ideas. As the weather gets colder, there's temptation to skip a meeting. Please only do so if necessary because we must have a quorum to meet by state law.

Annual Reporting/IRS Filing As I mentioned last month, we are to file an Annual Report to the Illinois Secretary of State office online. This reporting records were filed in late October. Our nonprofit membership remains in good standing with the SOS. Looking Ahead – A Continued Commitment

Over the next few months I still plan on filing taxes with the IRS in January. I will continue to serve in my capacity attending Executive Board and on the newly formed Bylaw Committee.

Some individuals have already offered assistance by sending in suggestions for the committee to consider once we meet. If you mull over them and see something that needs to be addressed, please feel free to send us the information. I look forward to working with everyone involved and hope that together we can strive to serve more Veterans with more service.

In closing, please remain proactive if either of you are unable to attend any meeting by reaching out to each other...we need you, and so do our County Veterans.

Robert Arciola
Treasurer



A NOTE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT



ELIZABETH D. SOTO SUPERINTENDENT

At the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County (VACCC), our responsibility is to ensure Veterans and their families across Cook County continue to receive the essential services, resources, and advocacy they have earned. I have the privilege of leading this mission alongside our Deputy Superintendent and a remarkable staff that is the driving force behind the positive impact we are making every day.

Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County (VACCC)

October 2025

As we move through the final quarter of FY25, I want to take a moment to express my gratitude for the continued dedication, compassion, and integrity that define the work of our Veterans Assistance Commission team. In October alone, our office assisted 339 Veterans, each with their own story, their own challenges, and their own courage. Our staff handled 688 calls, conducted 27 outreach events, and welcomed 86 new Veterans to our programs. These numbers, though impressive, only begin to reflect the real impact of our service, the relief of a Veteran who finally receives housing support, the gratitude of a family whose utilities remain on, and the peace of mind of those who know they are not forgotten.

In October, our total immediate financial aid reached to **\$111,759.28** directly to Cook County Veterans which is the highest ever in a single month provided in our VAC history! These funds covered essential support such as rent, utilities, transportation, food assistance, plus more to Veterans and their families throughout Cook County.

Behind every number is a story, a burden eased, a new path made possible. The continued collaboration of our VAC staff, community partners, and Cook County Elected Officials ensures that the VAC remains a trusted place of support and advocacy for all who have served. As we approach the close of this fiscal year, I remain deeply proud of what we've accomplished together. Our mission is not measured by statistics alone, but by the heart we bring to every interaction and the hope we restore in every Veteran we serve.

With gratitude and respect,
Elizabeth Soto
Superintendent, Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County

VACCC



Veterans Assistance Commission
Cook County

VETERANS ASSISTANCE COMMISSION LAUNCHES FIRST WEEK OF "TOMORROW STARTS TODAY" COMPUTER LITERACY PROGRAM

The VACCC successfully launched its first week of the **Your Tomorrow Starts Today (YTST) Senior Veteran Computer Literacy Program**, welcoming elderly Veterans eager to build their computer literacy skills. This initiative goes beyond financial support - focusing on strengthening Veterans in a holistic way.

By helping participants navigate technology, access online resources, and develop digital confidence, the VACCC is working to enhance not just their financial or professional capabilities, but also their mental and emotional well-being.

Programs like YTST reflect our commitment to empowering Veterans with the tools, knowledge, and support they need for long-term independence and success in the modern world.



**VACCC Leaders Address Ninth District
Illinois American Legion on
Strengthening Veteran Support
Networks**

VACCC Superintendent Elizabeth D. Soto and Deputy Superintendent Grant Jacobson had the honor of speaking at the Ninth District Illinois American Legion meeting. The gathering brought together dedicated leaders who continue to serve their communities long after their military service, reinforcing the vital role of Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) in supporting those who have worn the uniform.

During their remarks, Elizabeth and Grant emphasized that engaging VSOs is central to the mission of the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County. Each conversation and partnership helps strengthen the network of support that delivers tangible outcomes for Veterans and their families. They expressed gratitude for the Legion's continued leadership and reaffirmed VACCC's commitment to building collaborative relationships that make meaningful impacts where they matter most - on the ground, in communities across Cook County.



VACCC Superintendent Elizabeth D. Soto and Deputy
Superintendent Grant Jacobson

**Together, we're making a
measurable impact in the lives of
Veterans across our community.**



VETERANS FIELD GUIDE TO GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN



The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) estimates 97 percent of VA employees continue to work during a shutdown, according to the VA Human Capital Contingency Plan. VA is committed to provide quality, consistent care and services to Veterans, families, Caregivers, and Survivors. VA's mission allows no exception to this standard even when operations are limited by the absence of appropriations (commonly known as a "Government shutdown").



SERVICES TO VETERANS NOT IMPACTED:



VA Medical Centers, Outpatient Clinics, and Vet Centers will be open as usual and providing all services.



VA benefits will continue to be processed and delivered, including compensation, pension, education, and housing benefits.



Burials will continue at VA national cemeteries. Applications for headstones, markers, and burial benefits processing will continue.



The Board of Veterans' Appeals will continue decisions on Veterans' cases.



Call Centers: VA's primary call center (1-800-MyVA411) and the Veterans Crisis Line (Dial 988, Press 1) will remain open 24/7. The VA Benefit Hotline (1-800-827-1000) will be available Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. ET.



Suicide prevention programs, homelessness services, and caregiver support will continue.



HAVE A QUESTION? CALL US!

The one number all Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors can use to access VA resources 24 hours-a-day, 365 days-a-year.

1-800-MYVA411 (1-800-698-2411)



SERVICES TO VETERANS IMPACTED:



VA will cease providing transition program assistance and career counseling.



Call Centers: VA's GI Bill (1-888-GIBILL-1) and National Cemetery Applicant Assistance (1-800-697-6947) hotlines will be closed.



VA benefits regional offices will be closed.



Public Affairs and outreach to Veterans will cease, including social media, VetResources emails, and responses to press inquiries.



No grounds maintenance or placement of permanent headstones at VA cemeteries.

Applications for pre-need burial at VA cemeteries will not be processed.

No printing of new Presidential Memorial Certificates.



No outreach to state, county, tribal, municipal, faith-based, and community-based partners by VA Central Office.

In the event of a prolonged shutdown, VA will continue to review and update its plan in conjunction with the applicable legal requirements and circumstances. Please visit www.whitehouse.gov/omb/ or www.VA.gov for updated information.

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Download the VA Welcome Kit www.va.gov/welcome-kit/

Subscribe to #VetResources www.va.gov/vetresources/

Veterans Crisis Line: Dial 988, then Press 1

Call 1-800-MyVA411 (1-800-698-2411) or visit <https://www.va.gov/contact-us/>



Contact Us



Scan now to follow
us on our Social
Media



Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center

1100 S. Hamilton Ave, C-011

(LL)Chicago, IL 60612

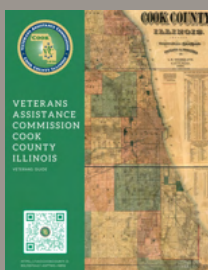
(312) 433-6010

VACCC@cookcountyil.gov



To speak to a
representative and
learn more about our
services, please scan
QR code or visit

<https://hovqr.to/de421623>



For a Digital Copy of our
Veterans Resources
Guide please scan

