

MONTHLY

Must

JUNE 2026

VETERANS ASSISTANCE COMMISSION
OF COOK COUNTY



Memorial Day
Celebrations

Camo to Community
Women Veterans Event

New Spotlight

Upcoming Events



SUPERINTENDENT'S CORNER



CONTINUING THE MISSION, ONE VETERAN AT A TIME

As we move further into Fiscal Year 2026, I am proud to share another month of meaningful impact was made possible through the dedication of our staff, Executive Board, community partners, and supporters throughout Cook County.

Every day, the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County remains committed to fulfilling its mission of ensuring that no Veteran in need stands alone. Through direct emergency financial assistance, advocacy, outreach, and benefit navigation, our team continues to meet Veterans where they are and provide support when it is needed most.

Elizabeth D. Soto

Superintendent
Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County

MAY 2026 HIGHLIGHTS

During the month of May, the VACCC provided:

\$110,988.32 in direct emergency financial assistance and support services to Veterans and their families throughout Cook County.

FISCAL YEAR PROGRESS

As demand for services continues to rise, the VACCC remains on pace to achieve one of the most impactful years in our organization's history. The increasing number of Veterans seeking assistance is a reminder of both the challenges facing our community and the importance of maintaining a strong safety net for our Cook County Veterans.

Their needs do not pause, and neither does our commitment to serving them. Whether assisting a Veteran facing a financial crisis, helping a family through a difficult loss, or connecting someone to earned VA benefits, our focus remains on delivering timely and compassionate assistance.

LOOKING AHEAD

As we enter the summer months, our priorities remain clear:

- Expanding access to services throughout Cook County
- Strengthening partnerships with Veteran serving organizations
- Increasing outreach efforts to reach underserved Veterans
- Continuing to improve operational efficiency and service delivery
- Ensuring Veterans receive every benefit and resource they have earned through their service

To every Veteran who has trusted us for assistance, we thank you. To our staff, Executive Board, Commissioners, delegates, and community partners, thank you for your continued dedication to our Veteran community. Together, we will continue building a stronger support system for Cook County Veterans and their families.

SPOTLIGHT

Illinois Joining Forces

The Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County is proud to highlight our partner, Illinois Joining Forces (IJF), a statewide network dedicated to connecting Service Members, Veterans, and their families with the resources they need. Through partnerships with more than 200 organizations across Illinois, IJF helps individuals navigate available services and ensures that no Veteran or military family has to face challenges alone. Their mission is built around a "no wrong door" approach, helping connect individuals to the right support regardless of where they first seek assistance.

Through its Care Coordination Center, IJF provides personalized resource navigation and referrals for a wide range of needs, including housing, employment, behavioral health, financial assistance, caregiver support, and other community-based services. Rather than replacing existing organizations, IJF serves as a central hub that helps Veterans and their families identify and access the programs best suited to their circumstances.

Veterans, Service Members, and family members seeking assistance can contact Illinois Joining Forces directly by calling **833-INFO-IJF** (833-463-6453). Additional information and referral services are available through their website. Whether you are looking for support today or simply want to learn more about available resources, IJF stands ready to help connect you to the assistance you have earned.



ILLINOIS JOINING FORCES

*Supporting Service Members, Veterans
and their Families*

From our EXECUTIVE BOARD



FRANK GUTIERREZ
PRESIDENT



JESUS SEGURA
1ST VICE PRESIDENT



DUTCH DEGROOT
2ND VICE PRESIDENT

JUNE QUARTERLY MEETING - RSVP REQUIRED

The month of June is here, and our Quarterly Commission Meeting is scheduled for June 23, 2026. When you receive the registration email, please RSVP as soon as possible. With 51 distinct organizations represented on the Commission, securing a statutory quorum is a significant logistical undertaking. Prompt registration greatly reduces administrative burdens and helps ensure that the Commission can legally conduct business on behalf of the Veterans we serve.

STAFFING AND HIRING PIPELINE UPDATE

While funding remains available in FY26 to support additional staffing, the Cook County hiring process continues to present delays that have impacted our ability to bring on needed personnel. Addressing both staffing levels and hiring efficiency remains a top priority for Commission leadership. Despite these challenges, our staff continues to deliver exceptional results. Month after month, they have established new performance benchmarks while maintaining a high standard of service to Veterans and their families throughout Cook County. Members of the Board have had the opportunity to observe outreach efforts firsthand and remain impressed by the professionalism, dedication, and effectiveness demonstrated by our team in the field.

GOVERNANCE, OVERSIGHT, AND OPEN MEETINGS ACT COMPLIANCE

The Military Veterans Assistance Act functions effectively because of the active involvement of Veterans and Veteran-serving organizations. Each delegate and alternate serves in a role similar to that of a trustee or commissioner, representing their organization while providing governance, oversight, and accountability for the operations of the VACCC. With that responsibility comes the obligation to comply with the Illinois Open Meetings Act (OMA) and all applicable governing statutes. These requirements are essential to preserving transparency, public trust, and the integrity of the Commission's mission.

~~**Action Required:** All delegates and alternates who have not yet completed OMA training are asked to do so and submit their certificates to the VACCC office at their earliest convenience.~~

TOWNSHIP VSO ACCREDITATION UPDATE

Recently, several townships that had previously received Veteran Service Officer accreditation had that accreditation withdrawn by the **National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO)**. Under existing law and accreditation standards, these certifications should not have been issued. It has come to the attention of the Board that inaccurate information is being circulated regarding both the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County and the proposed decertification of certain townships.

Veteran Service Officers. To ensure the record is clear, the Board wishes to reiterate the following:

- The VACCC did not advocate for or implement the decertification of township VSOs.
- Any statements suggesting that the VACCC was responsible for these actions are false and misleading.
- The VACCC was not the motivating force behind the proposal and has no authority over NACVSO accreditation decisions.

Additionally, suggestions that the VACCC should immediately absorb or assume responsibility for the resulting operational impacts fail to recognize the Commission's current staffing and resource constraints. As additional information becomes available, the Board will continue to provide updates and ensure that delegates receive accurate and timely information regarding any developments. Thank you for your continued service, engagement, and commitment to the Veterans of Cook County. We look forward to seeing you at the June 23 Quarterly Meeting.

CAMO TO COMMUNITY

Women Veterans Event

MAY 8TH

Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County proudly participated in the Camo to Community Women Veterans Event held in Richton Park. The event provided an important opportunity for Women Veterans throughout the community to connect directly with VACCC staff and learn more about the benefits, services, and advocacy available to them through our office. Deputy Superintendent Grant Jacobson and Veteran Services Manager Justyna Berry were present to engage with attendees, answer questions, and provide guidance on the unique challenges and needs facing Women Veterans today.

Throughout the event, VACCC staff were able to brief Veterans on available VA benefits, explain the wide range of support services offered by the VACCC, and highlight the continued advocacy efforts being made on behalf of Women Veterans across Cook County. Several attendees also took the opportunity to begin the claims process with assistance from our team, helping ensure they can access the benefits and resources they have earned through their service. Events such as these continue to strengthen community partnerships while reaffirming VACCC's commitment to serving every veteran with dignity, support, and respect.



MEMORIAL DAY

Ruck March

MAY 23RD

Community members, Veterans, and local organizations gathered in partnership for the Memorial Day Ruck March, an event dedicated to honoring the memory and sacrifice of our fallen Veterans. The event was made possible through the combined efforts of several Veterans-serving organizations and community partners, including the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County, American Legion Post 525, VFW Post 1337, the Mount Prospect Lions Club, local Mount Prospect Police, and many others committed to preserving the spirit and meaning of Memorial Day within the community.

Representing VACCC at the event were Board Vice President Dutch DeGroot, and VACCC Delegates Bill Starr, Laura Matuszak, and Outreach Coordinator Julian Calderon. The Mount Prospect Lions Club also generously provided food and refreshments for attendees, helping foster a welcoming environment for reflection, remembrance, and fellowship.

The Memorial Day Ruck March served as a meaningful opportunity for the community to unite in remembrance of those who gave their lives in service to our nation, while also reinforcing the continued importance of supporting and honoring Veterans and their families throughout Cook County.



MEMORIAL DAY

Commemorassion

MAY 25TH

On Memorial Day, May 25th, leadership from the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County participated in multiple community commemorations honoring the sacrifice and service of our nation's fallen Veterans. Superintendent Elizabeth Soto attended the Major General John A. Logan Memorial Day Commemoration, where she and many other Cook County leaders, like President Toni Preckwinkle, VACCC President Frank Gutierrez, and CCVA Director Vanessa Walters, reflected on the meaning and importance of Memorial Day, honoring those who gave their lives in service to the United States and recognizing the lasting impact of their sacrifice on our communities and nation.

At the same time, Deputy Superintendent Grant Jacobson was graciously invited by American Legion Post 50 to participate in their Memorial Day speaking event, where he addressed not only post members but also local Veterans and community members gathered in remembrance of the day. Both events served as thoughtful and important opportunities for VACCC leadership to stand alongside the Veteran community in reflection, remembrance, and support. VACCC remains honored to participate in these commemorative events and continues its commitment to serving and advocating for Veterans throughout Cook County.








Connect with us



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Our Locations

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Hours Of Operations

Monday - Friday
 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
 Benefits window closes by
 3:00 p.m. (Headquarters Office)



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Intake Form