



# VACCC LAUNCHES PILOT VBA MST PRESENTATION & CLAIMS CLINIC TO SUPPORT SURVIVORS

DECEMBER 2, 2025

The VACCC formally opened its newest service location at 69 West Washington, marking a significant step forward in expanding accessible, centralized support for Veterans across Cook County. The ribbon-cutting ceremony brought together VACCC leadership - including President Frank Gutierrez—alongside community partners and county officials such as President Toni Preckwinkle, Commissioner Tara Stamps, Commissioner Josina Morita, and representatives from Commissioner Miller’s office. Their attendance underscored the

county’s shared commitment to strengthening the network of services available to those who served. The new office will be managed by Justyna Berry, who will oversee daily operations, staff coordination, and direct engagement with Veterans seeking assistance.

The 69 West Washington location is built to function as a comprehensive resource hub, offering full VSO claims and benefits services, on-site benefits counseling, and guidance navigating federal, state, and county programs.

In a major enhancement to VACCC’s service model, the site will also operate as a specialized MST triage point, providing a confidential and trauma-informed entryway for survivors of Military Sexual Trauma. Trained staff will assist Veterans in accessing clinical care, crisis resources, financial supports, and long-term case coordination.

VACCC leadership emphasized that this new downtown location addresses the growing need for fast, reliable, in-person support in the heart of Chicago’s civic center. By combining claims expertise with targeted MST triage capabilities, the office aims to reduce barriers to care and ensure timely, compassionate assistance.





## SUPERINTENDENT'S CORNER



### ELIZABETH D. SOTO SUPERINTENDENT

As we welcome and begin the New Year, I want to take a moment to sincerely thank our members, partners, and the Cook County Veterans we are privileged to serve. The close of FY25 gives us the opportunity to pause, reflect on the meaningful impact of our work, and step into the year ahead with renewed purpose and hope.

Every dollar distributed, every Veteran assisted, and every outreach event conducted in December represents a shared promise, that no Cook County Veteran will ever face hardship alone. As Superintendent, I am incredibly proud of what we have achieved together and truly inspired by the dedication and momentum that will carry us forward into the year ahead.

#### Operational Impact & Community Engagement

Beyond financial assistance, December reflected strong engagement and operational momentum:

- **287 in-office Veteran** visits
- **493 incoming calls** for assistance and case management
- **24 outreach events** conducted throughout Cook County
- **54 new Veterans onboarded** into VAC services

These metrics demonstrate not only demand, but trust that the VACCC remains a reliable, responsive, and Veteran-centered resource to our Veteran community.

## December 2025: Supporting Veterans Where It Mattered Most

In December 2025, the Veterans Assistance Commission provided \$91,301.75 in direct financial assistance to Veterans across Cook County.

These funds were distributed to address the most pressing needs facing our Veteran community during the first month of the new fiscal year.

#### Key Areas of Support Included:

- **Housing Stability:**
- Rent assistance totaling \$17,400 and mortgage assistance of \$11,025 reflected the continued need to prevent housing instability and displacement.
- **Essential Utilities:**
- Over \$14,500 was provided to assist with electric, gas, and water services, ensuring Veterans maintained access to essential household utilities.
- **Food & Personal Hygiene:**
- \$19,200 in food cards and \$9,700 in hygiene assistance supported basic living needs and reinforced food security during a critical time of year.
- **Transportation Access:**
- CTA transportation assistance totaling \$2,246.50 enabled Veterans to access employment, medical appointments, court obligations, and VAC services.
- **Burial & Memorial Assistance:**
- \$16,560 was provided to honor Cook County Veterans who passed away and to support their families with compassion.

# SUPERINTENDENT'S CORNER

Looking Ahead Towards A Positive Outlook for the Year

The Veterans Assistance Commission is motivated to enter the new fiscal year with **operational readiness, strategic focus, and a deep sense of responsibility.**

In the year ahead, we will continue to:

- Strengthen service delivery and outreach across Cook County
- Enhance operational efficiency and accountability
- Expand access points and partnerships
- Ensure Veterans' needs are addressed

Together—with our members, staff and community partners we will continue to be a pillar of support for Cook County Veterans and their families. Thank you for your continued trust, engagement, and commitment to those who have served.

With gratitude and respect,



Superintendent  
Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County



# MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE BOARD

DECEMBER 2025

Our staff provided an excellent fourth-quarter briefing, highlighting their continued success in serving Veterans. The membership also approved a clarification to our outreach policy, directing our outreach teams and VSOs to focus efforts where we can reach the greatest number of Veterans. While we hoped to expand our presence in FY26, our current budget simply does not allow for all we had planned. The number of Veterans we serve continues to grow, yet we know many more still need assistance. Despite limited resources, our staff consistently exceeds expectations, and they deserve recognition.

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**

## VACCC SUPPORTS CICERO POST 96 AMERICAN LEGION WITH COMMUNITY DONATION

December 4, 2025



On December 4th, the VACCC reinforced its commitment to supporting Veteran-serving partners across the county through a donation to Cicero Post 96 American Legion. Representatives from the Post visited the VACCC office to collect several bags of donated toys, which will be distributed directly to the children of Veterans in the Cicero area. The effort reflects a shared mission to ensure Veteran families are supported not only through services, but through meaningful community engagement.

Cicero Post 96 has demonstrated sustained leadership in serving its local Veteran population, maintaining a strong focus on family support, outreach, and community involvement. During the visit, VACCC staff had the opportunity to learn more about the Post's ongoing initiatives and the impact they are making on Veterans and their families. The level of engagement and dedication shown by the Post underscores the importance of strong partnerships between county agencies and local Veteran organizations.

VACCC's strategic outreach model is built to support efforts like these throughout Cook County. By working collaboratively with organizations that are deeply embedded in their communities, VACCC is able to extend its reach and reinforce the broader network of support available to Veterans. Supporting partners such as Cicero Post 96 allows VACCC to amplify services, respond to local needs, and ensure resources are reaching Veterans where they live.





**VACCC LEADERSHIP RECOGNIZED AT  
SERVICE ACADEMY NOMINATION  
CEREMONY HOSTED BY  
CONGRESSWOMAN DELIA RAMIREZ**

DECEMBER 4, 2025

The VACCC was honored to participate in a Service Academy Nomination Ceremony hosted by Congresswoman Delia Ramirez and her team on December 4, 2025.

At the invitation of the Congresswoman's office, Superintendent Elizabeth Soto attended the ceremony recognizing outstanding students selected for nomination to U.S. Service Academies.

Superintendent Soto served as a member of the Service Academy Selection Board, contributing her experience and leadership to the rigorous evaluation process. In recognition of her service and dedication,



Congresswoman Ramirez formally presented Superintendent Soto with a commendation, acknowledging her efforts in supporting and advancing opportunities for future military leaders.

Congresswoman Ramirez was present throughout the ceremony, along with members of her staff, underscoring the importance of collaboration between federal representatives and local Veteran-serving agencies. The event celebrated academic excellence, leadership, and commitment to service among the nominees, while also highlighting the critical role community leaders play in shaping the next generation of service members.

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The VACCC's participation in the ceremony reflects the Commission's broader mission to support Veterans, service members, and those aspiring to serve, while strengthening partnerships with elected officials and community stakeholders across Cook County.

The Commission extends its appreciation to Congresswoman Ramirez and her team for the invitation and for recognizing the vital contributions of Veteran-serving professionals in fostering pathways to service and leadership.



## VACCC Establishes Historic, Ongoing Presence at Jesse Brown VA Medical Center

December 15, 2025

The VACCC marked a historic milestone with its first-ever invitation to table in the main corridor of the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center, a significant step forward in expanding direct, on-site support for Veterans in Central Cook County.

This initial engagement represents more than a single outreach event. For the first time, the VACCC has become a permanent fixture within the halls of Jesse Brown, allowing staff to provide immediate, face-to-face assistance to Veterans accessing care at one of the region's premier VA healthcare facilities.

The Jesse Brown VA Medical Center serves a substantial portion of Central Cook County's Veteran population, making this partnership especially impactful. During the inaugural day of tabling, the VACCC staff interacted with more than 40 Veterans, with a single staffer providing direct, on-site assistance to 11 individuals.



Demand for services was so high that staff remained continuously engaged throughout the event and exhausted all available outreach materials, underscoring both the need for and value of the VACCC's presence within the facility.

Veterans sought assistance across a range of needs, including benefits navigation, resource referrals, and emergency support services – demonstrating the importance of placing trusted, accredited Veteran service providers directly where Veterans already receive care. Building on the success of this initial outreach, the VACCC will now maintain a regular presence at the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center every Tuesday and Thursday, ensuring consistent, reliable access to services for Veterans and their families.

This recurring schedule reflects the VACCC's commitment to sustained engagement rather than one-time outreach. The establishment of this ongoing partnership represents a major advancement in VACCC's mission to deliver dignified, accessible, and Veteran-centered support throughout Cook County; particularly for Veterans navigating complex systems while managing health care needs.



## VSO Corner

Throughout December, our Veterans Service Officers continued delivering consistent, high-quality support to Veterans and their families across Cook County. Every interaction reflected our commitment to meeting Veterans where they are and helping them move forward with the benefits they have earned. The outcomes below highlight the meaningful work taking place daily in our offices.

### **Power of Attorney Support (VA Form 21-22)**

Our team assisted **104** Veterans in establishing accredited representation. This critical first step ensures Veterans have informed advocacy throughout the VA claims process and access to knowledgeable guidance at every stage.

### **Intent to File Submissions (VA Form 21-0966)**

VACCC filed **63** Intent to File forms, preserving effective dates and safeguarding future benefits for Veterans as they prepare to submit full claims.

### **New Claims Filed (VA Form 21-526EZ)**

During December, **57** new claims were submitted. Each claim represents a Veteran's service, lived experience, and rightful pursuit of earned benefits.

### **Appeals and Decision Reviews**

Our VSOs submitted **42** appeals and higher-level reviews, standing alongside Veterans seeking review, clarification, or correction of prior VA decisions.

These numbers represent more than productivity, they reflect real impact. Each form submitted and each conversation held moved a Veteran closer to stability, care, and recognition. Our VSO team continues to lead with precision, compassion, and accountability in service to the Veteran community.

As we move forward, we are building on this momentum with expanded outreach, strengthened partnerships, and continued commitment to ensuring Veterans across Cook County receive the support they deserve.



**DECEMBER 2025  
CLAIMS & APPEALS ACTIVITY –  
SERVING COOK COUNTY'S VETERANS**



# Contact Us



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## Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center

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(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>



## George W. Dunne Cook County Administration Building

69 W. Washington Chicago, IL

Suite 1420

**(312) 603-3865**

**vacvso@cookcountyil.gov**



For a Digital Copy of our  
Veterans Resources  
Guide please scan

