

NCSL Task Force on Military and Veterans Affairs

August 13, 2023 – Indianapolis, IN

Meeting Summary

Meeting Recap:

Members of the NCSL Task Force on Military and Veterans Affairs met on Sunday, Aug. 13 in Indianapolis as a preconference to the Legislative Summit. The meeting began with opening remarks by task force co-chairs Sen. Bryce Reeves (R-Va.) and Rep. Tina Orwall (D-Wa.), followed by introductions from the numerous state legislators, legislative staff, private sector sponsors and others in attendance. Sessions were held on topics such as the National Guard, state services for veterans and their families, suicide prevention, juvenile justice on military installations, Sentinel Landscapes, and Department of Defense support during natural disasters and other emergencies.

Action Items

- Consider topics brought up during the member roundtable for future sessions.
- Determine date and location of next meeting.

Key Takeaways

Spotlight on Military and Veterans Affairs in Indiana

Speaker: **Major General R. Dale Lyles**, the adjutant general of Indiana

- The [Indiana National Guard](#) (INNG) is comprised of approximately 14,000 soldiers, airmen, volunteer reservists, state and federal civilian employees and their families. Many of these soldiers are deployed federally. The adjutant general is a cabinet member, reporting directly to the governor.
- The National Guard is more important than ever in terms of response to natural disasters, cyberattacks, and civil disturbances.
- State and federal funding is essential to maintain armories, some of which were built in the 1930s.
- The U.S. adopted an all-volunteer force in 1973. While this has made us the most professional military in the world, volunteers have decreased significantly, particularly in the last three years. During the Iraq War, up to 7,000 volunteered. This year less than 2,500 will have joined.
- Indiana has worked with the legislature to provide benefits beyond what the federal government offers to improve National Guard recruitment. This includes free tuition at state universities, a \$1,000 bonus and 100% state income tax exemption. Major general Lyles mentioned Minnesota may have a retention bonus and Massachusetts pays a bonus to anyone who has been deployed.
- Lyles is part of a national committee to adjust both the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) test and physical fitness standards to join the military. An example is the use of a calculator, flexibility in terms of past ADHD medication.
- Advice for state legislators: (1) Ensure adequate funding for the National Guard to quickly respond to natural disasters with the right equipment; (2) Help with recruiting above the federal standard.

Speaker: **Gabrielle Owens**, general counsel and legislative director, Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs

- Four years ago, the mission of the [Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs](#) (IDVA) was to serve “eligible” veterans. This was changed to all veterans as it didn’t reflect the work they do.
- Indiana has a veteran population of 390,000, which is declining due to aging Vietnam veterans.

- IDVA manages the Indiana Veterans Center, one veteran's home and one veteran's cemetery. Programs include tuition and fee exemption for children of veterans, reduced fee hunting and fishing licenses, property and income tax deductions, special license plates, a military family relief fund, and support for women veterans.
- The military family relief fund is an award-winning program that helps veterans and families experiencing financial hardships (car repairs, rent, food, gas, etc.).
- IDVA employs six district officers to provide training to support the 92 county veterans service officers employed by the federal VA
- IDVA is located in a building that was the first American Legion headquarters, which also houses veterans organizations and other vet-connected programs.

Suicide Prevention Policy Initiatives

The session focused on two national initiatives: the Governor's and Mayor's Challenges to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF) and implementation of the 988 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

Speaker: **Dr. Richard McKeon**, senior advisor in the SAMHSA 988 and Crisis Office, [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#)

- CDC released preliminary suicide data on Aug. 10, 2023. Suicide deaths rose from 48,183 deaths in 2021 to an estimated 49,449 deaths in 2022.
- There is work being done to revise the national guidelines for suicide prevention and develop an action plan. An important part of these efforts has been the launch of 988.
- The lifeline is not new, launched in 2005. It previously had a long number (1-800-273-TALK) which was difficult to remember.
- 911 was the catalyst for the development of emergency medical services. The hope is that 988 will do the same for mental health.
- 100s of young people are texting 988 every day.

Speaker: **Dr. Larry Pruitt**, director of suicide prevention services, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Puget Sound Healthcare System

- [Veterans Crisis Line](#) is a hotline for military veterans, service members, their families, and caregivers. Thus far, there have been more than 7 million calls, 327,000 texts, 862,000 chats and 1.3 million referrals back to local VA hospitals.
- More than 600 suicide prevention coordinators provide direct care, outreach and education, oversight, and reporting. Their role is to make sure the crisis is resolved, the individual is safe and a connection has been made to obtain additional services.
- 54 states and territories and 19 communities are currently taking part in the [Governor's and Mayor's Challenges to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families](#). This is a partnership between the VA and SAMHSA.

Speakers: **Dr. Kathleen Metro**, director, military and veterans programs, National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, Vibrant Emotional Health; **Ryan Seymour**, U.S. Army veteran and program manager for standards, training and practices, Veterans Crisis Line (VCL), Vibrant Emotional Health

- With the growth of 988, [Vibrant](#) is looking to expand its work. They will meet with more than 200 centers, learn from them and ask how to help.
- #1 reason veteran callers are not pressing 1 is they do not want to be connected to VA.

- This is the time for reconnaissance after the first year of 988. What needs maintaining, what needs innovating.
- 23% of callers feel suicidal, but that means 75% are not. Also want to know why people are NOT calling.
- There was a huge increase in call volume when the U.S. withdrew from Afghanistan. There was also an increase around the holidays.

Respondent: **Chris Marvin**, U.S. Army veteran and engagement specialist, Everytown for Gun Safety

- Military gun culture = training, safety and accountability
- Veterans are more likely to die from suicide than nonveterans;70% of veteran suicides are by gun. Why? Because they are more likely to own guns and guns are more lethal.
- If you don't separate the gun from the veteran in crisis, all the other interventions are not useful.
- [Everytown for Gun Safety](#) developed a [Continuum of Gun Access Interventions for Preventing Suicide](#).
 - Step 1: In-Home Storage. Two-thirds of veteran gun owners store their gun appropriately. Safe storage is a useful deterrent for youth suicide.
 - Step 2: Give the Keys. Keep the gun but lock it up and give key/code to a friend.
 - Step 3: Out-of-Home Storage. Ask a friend to store the gun.
 - Step 4: Voluntary Prohibitor. Laws in three states—Washington, Utah, and Virginia.
 - Step 5: Extreme Risk Protection Order. Temporary protection order for people who are a threat to themselves or others.
- The goal is to remove the guns from the veterans in crisis so they can receive help in other ways.

Juvenile Justice on Base: Improving Access to Juvenile Justice on Military Installations

Exclusive federal jurisdiction on military installations can send juveniles through an adult judicial system. Access to state juvenile and family courts may allow for more suitable outcomes. This session examined how state lawmakers can remove these barriers and pursue solutions that support military families.

Introduction of Speakers: **Tammie Perreault** and **Shane Preston**, Defense State Liaison Office, U.S. Department of Defense

Speakers: **John Sullivan**, concurrent jurisdiction project director & associate director for defense & security, Guidehouse Consultancy; **Lori Volkman**, concurrent jurisdiction legal director, Guidehouse Consultancy, & director, Vetrics Group, LLC

- The [Defense-State Liaison Office](#) provides state policymakers with expert insight on priorities affecting military families and their quality of life. One of the office's state policy priorities at the moment is [concurrent juvenile jurisdiction](#).
- In 1962, the Inventory Report on Jurisdictional Status of Federal Areas Within the States (known as the Eisenhower report) established four jurisdiction types on all federal enclaves—exclusive, concurrent, partial, and proprietary. Exclusive is most federal power and on down. Proprietary offers most state power and lessens as it goes up.
- Many federal military installations only have federal jurisdiction on them. There is no federal juvenile justice system, so when a child exhibits problematic behavior on an installation there is no system for them to enter for rehabilitation.
- Rounds of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) have made it difficult to determine jurisdictional lines. Some bases changed boundaries 10 times since they were founded, or they became joint bases.

- When a state gives up land to the federal government, it cedes it. When they get some back, it is called retrocession.
- Between one-half and three-fourths of active/reserve installations may require legislation to change statutory jurisdiction, retrocede exclusive jurisdiction or provide authority to support memorandums of understanding for concurrent oversight of juvenile offenses.

Briefing on the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) database entitled All State and Territory Benefits Analysis Database

Speaker: Allen Dow, Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency

- The [National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs](#) (NASDVA) was formed in 1946 to connect the leaders of these agencies in order to provide a medium for the exchange of ideas and information, among other things. Members represent all 50 states, the District of Columbia and U.S. territories. Nationally, this group is the second largest provider of services to veterans.
- The state benefits tracker is found on the member portal of NASDVA and contains a list of veterans benefits by state on 30 topics including education, employment housing, veterans' homes, taxes and military spouse licensing.

Task Force Member and Sponsor Roundtable

The following were some of the issues identified by task force members:

- National Guard recruiting, retention, referral incentives
- Tuition assistance
- Incarcerated veterans
- Environmental impact of military operations
- Military sexual assault
- Military spouse licensure
- Tax exemptions
- Licensure compacts
- Veterans' cemeteries
- Veterans' homes
- Suicide prevention
- Foreign ownership of land
- Military family support-food insecurity, childcare
- Addition of Space Force
- Infrastructure upgrades around bases

New Sponsor: Bombardier

- [Bombardier](#) is a world leading manufacturer of business aircraft headquartered in Montreal with a U.S. base in Wichita, Kan. They are working on the next generation of aircraft which will yield fuel savings of 30%. \$12 billion spent in U.S. and growing with 3,000 employees. Apprenticeship program.

Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape

[Sentinel landscapes](#) are areas where conservation, working lands and national defense interests converge. This session focused on the creation of the [Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape](#) by the efforts of 25 partners, anchored by four DoD installations and ranges and containing 45 designated parks, forests, fish and wildlife areas, and nature preserves. The partnership preserves and protects military mission readiness, operations,

testing and training capabilities, while also supporting agricultural lands, providing for watershed protections, restoring forests through sustainable land management, and assisting habitat preservation.

Speaker: **Rob McCrea**, landscape conservation attorney, The Conservation Law Center, Bloomington, Ind.

- Sentinel Landscapes are a natural fit—conservation supports compatible use and brings diverse stakeholders together.
- Three project examples:
 - The Busseron Creek conservation project will protect mission readiness at Lake Glendora by mitigating the security risk from direct line of sight to Navy testing. The remainder is public access for hunting, fishing, etc.
 - The recovery credit system with Fish and Wildlife Service will allow Camp Atterbury to mitigate future impacts to bat habitat off-site at these other locations nearby. REPI Challenge will support 50% of the acquisition, partners pay the other 50%.
 - Regional Conservation Partnership Program finds innovative ways to get more landowner engagement and sustainable farming and forestry practices in certain places. Will target military veteran landowners and farmers.

Briefing on Defense Support of Civil Authorities

Speaker: **Alicia Natwick**, Major, U.S. Army Reserve and Program Coordinator, NCSL

- [Defense support of civil authorities](#) (DSCA) is defined as “support provided by U.S. federal military forces, DOD civilians, DOD contract personnel, DOD Component assets, and National Guard forces in response to requests for assistance from civil authorities for domestic emergencies, law enforcement support, and other domestic activities.”
- Historically DSCA has been used in situations such as natural disasters, presidential inaugurations, border security, oil spill response and COVID-19. They are also working to be ready for new and emerging threats such as cyber and chemical agents.
- Support can include aviation lift, search and rescue or extraction, supplies, civil affairs and public information, and engineer capability.
- DSCA’s authority comes from the Stafford Act. They cannot respond to a disaster without a request from the governor, with the exception being the immediate response authority.
- What is a disaster in one community may not be a disaster in another.
- Each defense coordinating element corresponds to a FEMA region. A lot of states have agreements to help other states in the event of emergency. DSCA can buy time because they are so quick.
- Where do DSCA veterans go? Team Rubicon Disaster Response (founded by veterans), FEMA, Homeland Security

Next Task Force meeting time and place: TBD