

Lucinda Maupin, Veterans Service Officer, Belmont County

Belmont County Veterans Service Commission

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United States Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
Senator Sherrod Brown  
Veterans' Access to Benefits and Services in Appalachia

My name is Lucinda J. Maupin, I have been a lifelong resident of Belmont County, Ohio and I am a veteran of the United States Army serving on active duty from November 1981 to June 1989. In July 2001 I was hired as an administrative assistant to the Belmont County Veterans Service Officer. In January 2003 I became the Executive Director of the Belmont County Veterans Office. I am also a life member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, a member of the American Legion, AMVETS, and an accredited County Veterans Service Officer with the Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Officers and the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers.

In the almost nine years of working with the veterans in this area I have found that one of the biggest complaints from our veterans is access to health care. Our veterans are part of VISN 4 and use the VAMC in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania which is sixty miles away from our office and up to approximately one hundred miles for veterans living at the opposite end of the county. Our office provides transportation for veteran using the DAV transportation program. We have two vans that provide transportation to Pittsburgh Monday thru Friday and we pay two full time drivers from our county funds. When a veteran is scheduled for a compensation or pension (C&P) examination they might have to go to Columbus or Mount Vernon, Ohio and we provide transportation for those trips using our office van. Each trip means paying a part time back up driver to drive the van. Even with the three vans that we have available it does not seem to be enough. Our vans are full almost every day and there are times when we do not have the county van available to take a veteran to his/her C&P exam. This Wednesday, April 7, 2010 I had to deny a veteran transportation to Mount Vernon, Knox Community Hospital because our county van will not be available. I had a call from the St. Clairsville outpatient clinic on April 1, 2010 asking if we could provide veterans who did not have transportation to the VA Primary Care Clinic or to the pickup points for the vans to Pittsburgh and unfortunately we cannot do that due

to the cost of another driver. The veteran who the clinic was calling about was tracked down by the clinic after calling the VA's suicide hotline. This veteran could have died because the care he needed was not available. Veterans in our area do not have access to emergency care. If a veteran visits a local emergency room he/she is charged for the visit unless the VA decides the visit was life threatening, when transportation is not available a veteran may have no other option but to go to a local emergency room. Our county vans transport Monday through Friday the first van leaves at 6:00 AM to Pittsburgh and leaves to come back to Belmont County at 12:00PM. We have a van that leaves Belmont County at 10:00AM to Pittsburgh and leaves Pittsburgh when the last veteran is finished. We do not cover the weekends or holidays or any night time transportation. With additional funds for drivers (we have the vans) we could make a big difference.

Another problem we have in our area is that a lot of veterans and family members do not know we are here for them. We have put advertisements in the local papers and set up tables at the county fair and other events held throughout the county but we still do not reach everybody. Outreach can make a big difference to a veteran or his/her widow. I had a veteran from Powhatan Point tell me that I saved his life. He had lost his family in the floods in Shadyside, Ohio on June 14, 1992, shortly afterwards he lost his job and eventually he was planning on taking his own life. Someone had told him that our office would pay utility bills for him and he wanted to put his affairs in order before he killed himself so he came to the Powhatan City Building where I have a satellite office open each week and I told him about VA Pension. He decided to apply and within three weeks (that was the only time I have ever had a claim approved in three weeks) he was approved and he credits our office for saving him. I feel that if we had additional funds to advertise or to set up more satellite offices we could reach more veterans and possibly change more lives.

Widows or widowers are a forgotten group who are, in some cases, worse off than the veteran when it comes to knowing who to look for when they need help. A veteran can usually find information from other veterans or service organizations. A widow or widower may not have anyone they can turn to, to get information on benefits. I have recommended to some of the service organizations to advise their members to pre plan for their death benefits so their spouses know exactly what paperwork is needed and what he/she will be entitled to upon his/her death. We need to seek out our elderly widows/widowers and our veterans who can no longer make it to our office and make sure they get the benefits they are entitled to and in order to do this we need additional funds. We would need funding to provide a service officer for additional satellite offices and transportation.

Another problem facing Appalachia is the number of lost jobs in our area. So many of our veterans have been laid off from the steel mills and coal mines and other companies that have been affected by our economy and they do not have the education needed to find other gainful employment and compete with younger people who have an advantage over someone who may not have the training in computers or modern technology. Our older veterans who have lost their jobs have let their GI Bill or VEAP benefits expire and if they wanted to go to college they would be faced with having to take out student loans and after graduating they would have to start over with a large debt to repay. A veteran would be more likely to return to school if funds were available to help pay for his/her education.

I feel the county veterans offices are the link between the VA and the veteran. We need additional funding to develop and make our programs a success. Our office not only works with the veterans of Belmont County but we also help the veterans who come to us from West Virginia and we see the need for more transportation, easier access to health care, more service officers, and better education benefits every day, and rather than be bound to a county or state border it would be great to be able to assist all veterans of our region.

Thank you.

Lucinda J. Maupin  
Director/CVSO