

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS**



**Joint Hearing of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees**

**Hearing on Pending Legislation**

*March 8, 2023*

*Presented by*

*Mr. Michael McLaughlin*

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*CVSO Blue Earth County, Minnesota*

Chairman Bost, Chairman Tester, Ranking Member Takano, Ranking Member Moran, and distinguished members of the committees, my name is Michael McLaughlin. I currently serve as a County Veterans Service Officer in Blue Earth County, Minnesota, and I am the Legislative Director for the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers, or NACVSO. On behalf of NACVSO and its members it is my honor to share our legislative priorities for ensuring that veterans and their families have access to all the benefits and services they have earned.

### **“Improve Support for County and Local Governmental VSO”**

Governmental veterans service officers (GVSOs) work at the State, County, Tribal and Municipal levels and are the frontline workforce in their communities assisting and advocating for veterans every day. County Veterans Service Officers (CVSO) and their local equivalents comprise over two-thirds of all of VA’s accredited service officers and undertake a significant workload on behalf of the federal government in implementing VA policies and programs. This workload includes assisting veterans and their family members to file disability claims, enroll in VA healthcare, coordinate community care, access educational benefits, death benefits, homeless services, transportation services and everything in-between. CVSOs are also uniquely positioned to help policy and decision makers in VA understand both the issues veterans face and how well VA programs are working to address these issues. Although CVSOs are not employees of VA, they are the frequently the first and sometimes the only interface a veteran has with VA.

Despite the fact that total Federal grant spending to State and local governments is estimated to be over \$1 trillion or approximately 4.1 percent of GDP in 2023<sup>1</sup>, none of this funding is designated to support CVSOs or their local equivalents carry out their duties on behalf of VA. County Sheriffs and local law enforcement agencies receive funding support from the Department of Justice for hiring, training, and carrying out community policing programs. Local Social Services programs receive funding from the Department of Health and Human Services to support a variety of frontline economic and social well-being programs. These are just a few examples of how the federal government partners with local governments, except when it comes to helping our nation’s veterans get access to the benefits and services they need.

Veteran service offices are among the lowest funded in local government and across the nation. CVSOs face disparities in staffing levels, technology, education, and outreach due to a complete reliance on local funding. These challenges have become even more acute in recent years with the passing of historic legislation like the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act, MISSION Act, and the PACT Act. NACVSO is truly grateful for Congress’s action to pass these laws and the life changing impact they have on veterans and their families. However, these acts did not consider the additional infrastructure and support required at the local government level to meet the increased

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/ap\\_14\\_state\\_and\\_local\\_fy2023.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/ap_14_state_and_local_fy2023.pdf)

demand for veteran support services. The expansion of benefits under new legislation has created a de facto unfunded mandate for local governments across the country who are scrambling to meet an influx of requests from veterans for support.

A few examples of that increased demand are:

- El Paso County Colorado, where wait times for veterans seeking appointments with veteran service officers has increased by over three weeks
- Lake County, Illinois, where there has been a 400% increase in VA benefit inquiry calls received by staff
- The Town of Wilbraham, Massachusetts, where 62% of the disability claims filed since 8/10/2022 have been PACT Act related claims
- Medina County, Ohio, which has experienced a 67% increase in month to month claims and a 300% increase in office contacts.

These examples represent just a few of the thousands of similar scenarios playing out in counties and local government offices across the country today. And this is why NACVSO supports the bi-partisan Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach Act (CVSO Act) and encourages the committees to support it too. This Act would, for the first time, provide supportive grants from VA to County and local government equivalent veteran service offices to improve community support and outreach services for veterans and their families. Support to local governments is something that will ensure all veterans have access to an accredited veteran service officer, and ultimately access to the benefits and services they have earned and deserved.

Chairmen, Ranking Members, and members of the committees, on behalf of NACVSO and its members, I appreciate the important work you are doing here. State, County, Tribal and Municipal veterans' service offices are force multipliers for the federal government, and if we can bolster support to local veterans' advocates, we will be able to better support the needs of our nation's veterans and their families.

Thank you.