



## **Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers**

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### **Testimony on HF 4333 Veterans service office grant program provisions modified, and money appropriated. Greg Peterson, New Ulm**

My name is Greg Peterson; I am the Legislative Director for MACVSO, a membership-run organization of 150 County Veterans Service Officers employed in our 87 Counties. I have been a County Veterans Service Officer for 18 years and am eight highest in seniority.

First, I would like to thank the MN Legislature for creating the County Veterans Service Officer program 77 years ago. We have evolved immensely since 1945 and have helped hundreds of thousands of Veterans, dependents, and survivors. Today's CVSOs attend specialized training, receive an FBI investigation with fingerprints, and take an annual exam. We adhere to ethical standards, possess unique knowledge skills, and practice our talents beyond the personal moral obligations of an individual. We require a high degree of competency to help our customers navigate complex Federal and State programs, and we extend unrivaled empathy to each that seeks our assistance.

The CVSO grant program has been in existence since 1993 and uses the number of Veterans in each County to determine funding distribution. The Veteran population is reported annually by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, which bases its findings on "estimates and projections[1]" and not actual living Veterans. An unintended fallacy of this model is that the Veteran population is not synonymous with our client caseload. The data is devoid of spouses, dependent children, widows, or the nearly 13,000 Citizen Soldiers in Minnesota.

We count on grants to provide outreach, assist in the reintegration of combat veterans, collaboration with other agencies to enhance our services, and heed the Governor's mandate to eliminate Veteran homelessness.

Since the last appropriation in 2013, more than one-third of our Counties have dropped off their population tier and lost critical funding. Three counties fell off the lowest level this FY, each losing \$2500.

By slightly increasing the appropriation and allowing the Commissioner to provide a competitive grant, our Service Officers will recoup lost funding and implement innovative programs that work in their unique situations.

Finally, we favor increasing the appropriation to MACVSO, which we use for administrative costs, training, certifying our Service Officers, and reintegration services. We are the only State that sends a team of CVSOs to Army bases where our deployed Guardsmen are off-boarded from military to civilian status. We meet with every soldier, interview for health concerns, complete VA forms, and provide CVSO contact information before returning to Minnesota and hanging up their uniform. We are committed to fulfilling President Lincoln's 1865 promise "to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan."

Thank you for receiving my testimony, and I stand ready for your questions.

*Greg Peterson*