



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

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### **Testimony on HF 4324 House Veterans and Military Affairs omnibus bill 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<sup>1</sup>" 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, and the nearly 13,000 Citizen Soldiers in Minnesota.

We count on grants to fund outreach, assist in the reintegration of combat veterans, collaboration with other agencies, 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 formally, 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 home and hanging up their uniform.

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

*Greg Peterson*

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.va.gov/vetdata/about\\_us.asp](https://www.va.gov/vetdata/about_us.asp)



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Regarding Subdivision 2(c), Veterans Service Organizations Grant Program, I want you to know that each of our 150 CVSO's values and depends on our Congressionally Chartered VSOs' programming to aid Minnesota's Veterans.

- The American Legion's Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Committee, led by Department Service Officer Jeremy Wolfsteller, ensures that Minnesota's Veterans receive timely access to quality health care and benefits. CVSOs make up 3/5ths of Jeremy's Committee, which evaluates four Regional VA Medical Centers and their Clinics to ensure our Minnesota Veterans' well-being receives top priority.
- The DAV of MN Transportation Program provides free transportation to Veterans in Minnesota to attend their VA medical appointments. The program has 34 vehicles stationed in 20 communities around the state. I have a DAV-provided van, which has cut my \$16,000 transportation budget in half.
- The Military Order of the Purple Heart's First Responders Program pays respect to the bravery and sacrifice of Minnesota's Law Enforcement Officers and Fire Fighters killed or wounded on duty. They recently thanked and recognized Waseca Police Officer Arik Matson (who was shot in the head by a wanted suspect) for his faithful service and sacrifice in the line of duty.
- The VFW promotes patriotism and investing in our future generation through two youth scholarships targeted at high school and middle school students. Their Voice of Democracy program gives high school students a unique opportunity to express themselves through a democratic and patriotic-themed recorded essay. Middle School students enter the Patriot's Pen youth essay, which encourages young minds to examine America's history and their own experiences in modern American society by drafting a 300- to 400-word paper, expressing their views based on a patriotic theme.

I have mentioned a single program in only half of our State's VSOs. Together they have dozens of programs to support the needs of Minnesota's Veterans and their families.

I encourage the continued inclusion of these provisions in the omnibus bill.

*Greg Peterson*

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