

Congressionally chartered veterans organizations in Minnesota, working together, to pass legislation on behalf of all Veterans.



# Minnesota Commanders' Task Force 2021 Legislative Priorities



Five fast facts:

1. Veterans vote at a higher turnout rate than the general population.
2. Veterans make up 13 percent of the voting population in America.
3. Ignoring the concerns of Veterans has cost elections for candidates many times over.
4. Supporting Veterans garners elected leaders trust among the general public.
5. The Minnesota CTF informs our members about the actions of the Minnesota Legislature.

## Pass the Veterans Restorative Justice Act

This measure was passed by the Senate in August 2020 and the House in May 2019. It is expected to pass both chambers in September or October 2020 and be signed by the governor.

The Veterans Restorative Justice Act, sometimes called veterans treatment courts, allows judges to withhold pleas and assign help to veterans



facing criminal charges for behavior that can be connected to combat and other service-based trauma. If they meet the terms, they can avoid a civilian punishment for a military problem.

Minnesota Management and Budget estimates it saves \$1.3 million in the first two years and \$2.3 million the second two years.

The national level of most vets organizations have passed resolutions in favor.

## Reduce the cost of hunting, trapping and fishing licenses for disabled Veterans

We are working hand-in-hand with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to reduce the cost of hunting, trapping and

fishing licenses for service-connected disabled veterans.

We advocate for the Minnesota Legislature to approve the result of this proposal, as it would likely increase net license revenue for the DNR and give Veterans the health benefits that come from the great outdoors.



## Increase the state grant given to veterans service organizations

The annual grant for veteran service organizations has

been decreasing over the past several years and has not been updated since 2009.

We urge lawmakers to increase it to \$1 million for the sake of the long-term good.



## Fully fund the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs

Since the Civil War, Minnesota has been taking care of our veterans. A fully funded MDVA is not an accomplishment; it is an expectation — it is the Legislature's obligation to fully

fund the organization tasked with providing care for those that borne the battle, their spouses, their children, their widows and widowers and orphans.

From repairing the five Minnesota Veterans Homes to reducing Veteran suicide to fighting Veteran homelessness, the MDVA's mission is crucial.

## Expand the VA's Vet Centers in Minn.

Vet Centers are places where military members, veterans and their families can get counseling without paperwork hassles. They are proven to reduce suicide rates.

Minnesota has three Vet Centers — Brooklyn Park, Duluth and New Brighton — but they are operating at full capacity because demand is high, an American Legion analysis has found.

Our state has one of the lowest ratios of veterans-to-Vet



Centers in the nation because other states have expanded to address PTSD and suicide, and Minnesota has not.

The federal VA's process for expanding takes away precious resources and time from the existing Vet Centers. The VA has the funding in its budget to expand in Minnesota, but it chooses to spend elsewhere despite saying suicide is its top priority. We would like the VA to put Vet Centers in Mankato, Bemidji and St. Cloud.

We desire full backing from our congressional delegation and our state leaders, too.

## Modify the Homestead Market Value Exclusion

The 2019 session eliminated the eight-year cap for surviving spouses on the Homestead Market Value Exclusion, making it permanent.

In 2021, the CTF hopes lawmakers will adjust it so widows and widowers of

veterans could do a one-time transfer to a property of similar or lesser value, allowing them to live in a more manageable-size home.

The CTF has garnered support from cities and counties, as they would get tax value from houses returning to the market at full value.



## Increase hourly wage for personal care attendants

The average hourly wage for personal care attendants is \$11.34, which is \$2.18 above the poverty line and \$6 below the livable wage of \$16.34,

according to the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. The COVID-19 relief package in 2020 resulted in a temporary increase in hourly wage of 15 percent. It sunsets Jan. 1, 2021. The CTF would like to see that increase remain permanent.

## Give property-tax relief for Post homes

Post homes (buildings owned by veteran organizations, usually as a bar, restaurant or banquet hall) presently are taxed at a rate of 1 percent of assessed value, and state and county tax entities have been slow to adhere to this 2017 legislation, sometimes denying this law even exists. We would like to see it implemented universally and with alacrity.

Considering that Post homes



for The American Legion, VFW, AMVETS and other veteran service organizations do so much donating of time, money and building space in their communities, while at the same time struggling to remain open, the CTF would like to see the state give 100 percent property-tax relief to Posts that own buildings open to their communities. These cities and towns would be harmed in the short and long term without Post homes as gathering spaces.

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### Lawmakers, please know this:

There may be other groups claiming to represent Veterans in our state. They represent the interests of a sparse few.

Our agenda-forming process requires all commanders to agree. This agenda reflects

the interests of the vast majority of Veterans in Minnesota, and our input process includes the biggest Veteran supporters: spouses. We welcome our auxiliary members in our efforts.

Make no mistake. The CTF is "The Voice of Minnesota Veterans." Accept no substitutes.

