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STATE OF NEVADA
NEVADA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS SERVICES

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Type of Testimony:

- ☐ Presentation of an Agency Bill
- ☐ Testimony in Support
- ☐ Present Agency Concern
- ☒ Informational

KEY POINTS

- **Summary:** At the request of the Chair, Legislative Committee on Senior Citizens, Veterans, and Adults with Special Needs, the following information is provided on services for veterans in Nevada. Information provided includes an overview of the Nevada Department of Veterans Services (NDVS) and its role in serving the veterans of Nevada, recent successes, and new / planned initiatives. Also presented is information on military and veteran caregivers and veteran housing issues.
- **Information for the Committee:**
 - **Veteran Demographic Information**
 - **Who is the American veteran?**
 - Although veterans comprise a richly diverse group, most veterans are white, non-Hispanic, married males. Overall the average age of a veteran is 58 years old, with the largest group of veterans between the ages of 45 and 64. Most veterans are currently employed, have a combined family income of more than \$50,000, and have completed high school.
 - There are about 22 million veterans in the United States and between 228,000 and 300,000 in Nevada. According to the US Department of Veterans Affairs, while America's total veteran population declined 17% between 2000 and 2015; Nevada was one of only 11 states that had veteran population gains or only slight decreases during this period.
 - While the majority of veterans do not suffer from PTSD, 11-20% of OEF/OIF veterans and 30% of Vietnam Veterans do. This compares to an estimated 7-8% of the general population with PTSD. Given that direct exposure to trauma, serious injury, and the exposure to danger increase the risk of PTSD, the higher incidence of PTSD among veterans is not surprising.

- **What does tomorrow's veteran look like?**

- By 2040, the population is projected to decrease by ~7.9M (35%) and the distribution of veterans will continue to shift to the South and West in the next 25+ years.
- The female veteran population will continue to steadily increase for the next 25+ years and minority Veterans will make up 34% of the veteran population by 2014 as compared to 21% in 2013.
- While the veteran population will see a decline, about half of America's veterans are over age 65. According to the US Department of Veterans Affairs, this large increase will continue to have significant ramifications on the demand for health care.

o **NDVS Overview**

- **Vision:** Nevadans across the state celebrate the legacy of America's heroes—and working together we will ensure veterans and their families understand and have access to opportunities that improve their lives.

- **Mission:** Provide vital and efficient service to and advocacy on behalf of veterans, their dependents, and survivors; and provide our community and partners the opportunity to contribute in these endeavors. Through our four major programs we assist veterans prepare and submit claims for benefits, provide skilled nursing care, provide burial support at our state veterans' cemeteries, and help veterans successfully integrate into Nevada communities.

- **Programs:**

- **Veterans Advocacy and Support:** Veterans Service Officers in Las Vegas, Reno, Elko and Pahrump who advocate and advise veterans, families, and survivors regarding opportunities and benefits. Includes rural outreach visits to dozens of sites across the state in order to assist veterans and their families with access benefits and opportunities.
- **Nevada State Veterans Home:** A 180 resident facility in Boulder City that provides care to veterans, their spouses and Gold Star Parents. Certified by both the US Department of Veterans Affairs and by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid.
- **Cemeteries:** Southern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Boulder City and Northern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Fernley. Veterans and their immediate families are eligible for burial at Nevada's veterans cemeteries. We are developing Water Wise options decreasing reliance on costly city water.
- **Community Outreach:** Connecting Veterans with federal, state, city, private, and non-profit supporters. Includes virtual outreach through Nevada VetNet and person-to-person outreach at local veteran events, ROVER outreach to rural communities, and veterans community councils.

o **2014-2016 Successes:**

Connecting Veterans to Benefits:

- Developed and implemented a 20 credit hour online course that certifies attendees as Nevada Veteran Advocates (NVA). Almost 400 people enrolled in the course in 2015 with 80 who completed and received state certification. NVAs help veterans and their families connect to benefits and opportunities that improve their lives.

- Assisted Veteran Community Councils (VCCs) state-wide through advice, administrative support, and assisting open lines of communication.
- Partnered with Great Basin Community College (GBCC) to use the college's Interactive Video (IAV) system to connect VSO with veterans in rural areas to file claims for federal benefits.
- Applied for and received \$100,000 in grant funding from the US Department of Veterans Affairs to assist rural veterans travel to VA medical appointments in Reno, Elko and Salt Lake City, Utah.
- Applied for and received approval for an AmeriCorps Planning Grant to support the planning of a VISTA supported veterans outreach program.
- Newly approved staff has improved NDVS' ability to connect veterans with needs to service providers. In 2015, 208 outreach events were conducted, to include town halls, job and education fairs, rural VSO outreach events, presentations to community groups and veterans service organizations, etc.
- Completed initial phases of development, in partnership with the US Department of Veterans Services (VA), Nevada's Department of Administration, and six other states, a Veteran's Information System (VIS) that collects information from many databases across the state to locate and better serve veterans. Applied for and received a \$38,400 grant from the US Department of Veterans Affairs to help fund this project.

Honoring Nevada Veterans:

- Successfully applied for and received Operations and Maintenance Grants from the US Department of Veterans Affairs for the improvement of our Nevada State Cemeteries; \$5M to raise and realign headstones and improve turf at the Southern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemetery, and \$700,000 for expansion of the Northern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemetery Columbarium area.
- In partnership with Nevada's veteran service organizations, conducted about 85 ceremonies honoring Nevada Veterans.

Improved Timeliness and Quality of Claims Outcomes for Nevada Veterans:

- Published a first-ever VSO Standard Operating Procedures Manual.
- Conducted 3 workshops to train not only state employed VSOs but all other VA accredited VSOs in Nevada—at no cost.
- Completed training and accreditation of new VSO recently authorized by the State Legislature, almost doubling the number of state employed VSOs accredited by the VA. This has increased claims recovery from \$56.4M in SFY 2014 to \$97.2M in SFY 2015; and a \$32.8M dollar increase in revenues.
- Doubled the availability of appointments for veterans in northern and Central Nevada through the use of video-teleconferencing with technical and office space support from Great Basin Community College.

Supporting the Needs of Aging Veterans:

- The Nevada State Veterans Home achieved a 5 star status rating from Nursing Home Compare in 2015. This 5-star rating was the latest of numerous quality awards, including the prestigious HealthInsight Award which was presented to the home for each of the past three years.
- The 78th Legislature approved a state match portion (\$14.1M) for a veterans home to be built in Northern Nevada. 100% construction planning for the project is complete. As a result of the state match, VA has advanced the project from priority #94 to priority #63. We continue to engage our Congressional delegation to ensure support and are competitive for FFY 2017 federal match funding of \$33,507,012.11M.
- In 2015, the NSVH continued to develop ways to improve the care and quality of life of our veteran residents. Initiatives include: (1) giving mobile computers to veteran residents to increase social interaction via internet venues and to provide recreational and intellectual stimulation, (2) the development of a Mobility Garden, a new concept for nursing homes which takes physical therapy training outdoors and includes automobile transfers in a newly renovated vehicle in the garden, and (3) the construction of a Cantina/Sports Bar, a recreational space for veteran residents.

Assisting Veterans Gain and Hold Meaningful Employment:

- Continued to engage, train, and certify employers under the Nevada Green Zone Employer Program. In partnership with DETR, DHRM and private employers, expanding and modifying the program as the Nevada Patriot Employer Program (PeP) through the formation of an Employers of Veterans Council and the development of a tool kit that provides "how-to" information on hiring and retaining Veterans. Funded in part with a \$10,000 grant from the AT&T Foundation.
- Funded the program development of the College of Southern Nevada's Military Medic to LPN Program. The first two classes have graduated and initiatives are underway to expand this program to other Nevada colleges. The program expedites the process of completing the licensing requirements for military personnel to become licensed nursing practitioners.

Assisting Unique Population Veterans:

- Worked with state, county, city, and non-profit partners to develop Nevada's Veteran Homelessness Initiative. Conducted a state-wide convening of stakeholders and created a Task Force to identify best practices and barriers and create the state's first veteran homelessness action plan.
- Supported the Women Veterans Advisory Committee (WVAC), first created by Governor Sandoval's Executive order and later in NRS create a report that drove NDVS program changes and supported the passage of legislation supporting Nevada Women Veterans.

○ Initiatives:

- Continuing efforts to build and operate a Veterans Home to provide skilled nursing care for veterans in Northern Nevada.
- Modernize / enhance the Southern Nevada Veterans Home to ensure state-of-the art medical care.

- Build (or create) interactive agency access by placing NDVS Veterans Service Officers in Aging and Disability Resource Centers to assist with securing veteran benefits in conjunction with other state benefit programs.
- Expand the Nevada Veterans Advocate Program to ensure that wherever a veteran or their family lives in Nevada, a knowledgeable person can help connect them to veterans benefits and services. This includes training Nevada Veterans Advocates in tribal communities.
- Expand the NDVS Disabled Veterans Sports Program to address the needs of women veterans and veterans in rural Nevada.
- Develop a program addressing the needs of Nevada Women Veterans suffering from Military Sexual Trauma.
- With the completion of the Veterans Information System (VIS), create connections to every Nevada veteran to help inform them of benefits and opportunities.
- Initiate program to contact service members who plan to return to Nevada prior to their completion of military service and provide them with information regarding Nevada's Veterans Service programs.
- Develop water-wise options to decrease the reliance on city water at our Nevada State Cemeteries.
- Continuing state-wide coordination of efforts to end veteran homelessness, focusing on housing, employment, and wrap-around services.
- Study the needs of caregivers supporting veterans in Nevada and develop or recommend actions to support these needs.

- Fiscal Note: N/A