

**Sierra County
Board of Supervisors'
Agenda Transmittal &
Record of Proceedings**

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| MEETING DATE: May 3, 2016 | TYPE OF AGENDA ITEM: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Regular <input type="checkbox"/> Timed <input type="checkbox"/> Consent |
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| DEPARTMENT: Board of Supervisors APPROVING PARTY: Paul Roen, Supervisor, District 3 PHONE NUMBER: 289-3295 |
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AGENDA ITEM: Continued discussion and direction to staff on the formation of the Sierra County Veterans Program authorized by the Board of Supervisors on April 19, 2016. (SUPERVISOR ROEN)

SUPPORTIVE DOCUMENTS ATTACHED: Memo Resolution Agreement Other

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

FUNDING SOURCE:
GENERAL FUND IMPACT: No General Fund Impact
OTHER FUND:
AMOUNT: \$ N/A

ARE ADDITIONAL PERSONNEL REQUIRED?

 Yes, -- --
 No

IS THIS ITEM ALLOCATED IN THE BUDGET? Yes No

IS A BUDGET TRANSFER REQUIRED? Yes No

SPACE BELOW FOR CLERK'S USE

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| <p>BOARD ACTION:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Approved <input type="checkbox"/> Approved as amended <input type="checkbox"/> Adopted <input type="checkbox"/> Adopted as amended <input type="checkbox"/> Denied <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> No Action Taken | <input type="checkbox"/> Set public hearing For: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Direction to: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Referred to: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Continued to: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Authorization given to: _____ | Resolution 2016- _____ Agreement 2016- _____ Ordinance _____ Vote: Ayes: Noes: Abstain: Absent: <input type="checkbox"/> By Consensus |
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COMMENTS:

CLERK TO THE BOARD

DATE

A REPORT TO THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

A SYNOPSIS OF THE SIERRA COUNTY VETERANS PROGRAM COMMITTEE FINDINGS AND PROCEDURES FOR IMPLEMENTATION.

PURPOSE: An ad hoc committee of veterans' advocates was formed under the direction of the County Board of Supervisors on the 23rd of March. It was chartered with the responsibility to determine and recommend to the Board whether Sierra County should create a state sanctioned Veterans Service Office, and accept the financial assistance reported to be between \$20,000 and \$30,000 per year, or consider the feasibility of operating an equivalent, alternate program, managed by the county, to assist veterans in realizing the benefits they have earned. Extensive information was gathered, including that from: The Reno Veterans Administration Enrollment Administrator, Reno V.A. Public Information Office, Reno V.A. Decedent Affairs Supervisor, The President of the California County Veterans Service Office Organization, four County Veterans Service Officers, The California Department of Veterans Affairs North State Representative, Alpine County Administrators and The Nevada Department of Veterans Services. Additionally, information came from previous experience with The California Governor's Interagency Veterans Council, The California Department of Veterans Affairs Sacramento Network Coordinator, The Sacramento Veterans Health and Wellness Council and The California Veterans Legal Task Force.

After careful review it was decided by the committee to recommend that Sierra County continue to operate without a Veterans Service Office and address the needs of our military veterans with a unique approach which will provide increased effectiveness with reduced bureaucratic mandates. For this purpose the Sierra County Veterans Program was formed, of the same committee members, subject to approval by the Sierra County Board of Supervisors.

OBJECTIVE: The Sierra County Veterans Program will have two primary functions.

Outreach - The number of veterans in Sierra County is estimated to be approximately 450. Veterans represent approximately 10% of the national population, increasing to 12% in remote and rural counties and 15% in remote

and rural counties within California, 15% of 3,000 = 450. An effort to identify and list all county veterans has been initiated and currently the manifest has 189 names, approximately 40% of the county's estimated veteran population. A publicity campaign, listing 21 techniques to increase public awareness, has been created, introduced to the committee, and should be implemented to encourage Sierra County veterans to contact the Sierra County Veterans Program to learn of the benefits they have earned and are entitled to. Additionally, the committee was presented with a listing of 22 potential presumptions some veterans might have for intentionally avoiding any contact with the Veterans Administration. Our task, if a veteran presents these concerns, and if given the opportunity, is to dispel some misconceptions and offer accurate information. The text for our publicity campaign and public awareness program has been drafted and presented to the committee.

Enrollment - For a veteran to be eligible to receive benefits, including; health care (primary, emergency, long term and late stage aid and attendance), financial assistance (disability compensation, pensions, home loans, student aid and travel reimbursement), social services (housing, education, vocational rehabilitation, employment opportunities, dependent assistance and decedent benefits) and personal wellness counseling (intervention and prevention resources, coping skills, emotional support, and therapy), enrollment in the Federal Veterans Administration is required. Very few benefits are offered by the California Veteran's Administration and virtually no benefits are offered by County Veterans Service Offices. According to the V.A., fully two-thirds of all veterans are not enrolled. Of the estimated 450 Sierra County veterans this represents 300. Presuming some have decided, with full knowledge, to opt-out of V.A. enrollment and assistance perhaps as many as 200 remain. Our task is to offer information and, if the veteran desires, facilitate enrollment.

These Sierra County Veterans Program objectives, Outreach and Enrollment, can be efficiently targeted, without a Veterans Service Office, by reviewing and accessing the best resources available to us and implementing a procedure.

STATUS: The outreach effort by the V.A. is basically non-existent. There is no federal 'reverse induction system.' There are no federal Public Service Announcements to inform veterans of their benefits but there are those announcements reminding 18 year-olds to sign up for the Selective Service. Perhaps, because the demand is greater than the supply, they have decided this is the best way to avoid expected increased operational and benefit costs. The Reno V.A. Outreach Office was difficult to contact, ineffective and recently unmanned and rolled into a lesser office.

The outreach effort by County Veterans Service Offices, which currently exist in all 58 California counties except Sierra and Alpine, is also sparse at best. We note that three counties share with neighboring Veterans Service Offices; Yuba supplies Sutter, Inyo supplies Mono and Monterey supplies San Benito. We have learned of only 2 counties with formatted, effective, Outreach Programs and both have been structured and operated independent of the County Veterans Service Offices.

Enrollment in the Veterans Administration, required to receive benefits, can be conducted by the V.A., County Veterans Service Offices, independent veterans advocate programs or the individual veteran himself. It is, by far, preferable to have the process personally handled by the Reno V.A. They have the expertise, in a one-on-one interview, to create the required documents accurately, the ability to follow up on submitted applications, the direct connections to mitigate delays, to issue the Enrollment Card and schedule the first primary health care appointment. Historically, the down side to this approach has been, as easy as it is to apply for health benefits enrollment at the Reno Veterans Administration Hospital, it is very difficult to apply for financial benefits. Those requests, and the extreme bureaucratic quagmire associated, are handled by a completely separate administration at an overwhelmed Oakland regional office. The V.A. had a huge backlog of disability compensation and pension claims, a national exposure prompted a unique solution; deny all. Problem solved. Offices that administer to these financial claims are inaccessible to the public; no phone number, no contact information. This resulted in the advent of for-profit companies and attorneys who wrote applications and appeals at the veterans' expense.

A concept referred to as 'Catchment' dictates that Sierra County, as well as Plumas, Nevada, Placer and El Dorado Counties, could not benefit from the effective and well operated Reno V.A. office that handles disability compensation, pension claims and related assistance, though Modoc and Lassen Counties could. This fact represented a severe detriment to any Sierra County Veterans Program. Until last Thursday, the 14th of April. The previously undiscovered truth is that only Sierra County, of those ineligible, is, in fact, eligible and under the auspices of the Reno V.A. and the required, available and professional management assistance has been offered to us. This is extremely fortunate for Sierra County veterans and the effectiveness of our program.

PROCEDURE: The success of the Sierra County Veterans Program can be realized by combining the two strong assets; implementing our home-grown Outreach Program and working with the contacts we have made within the Reno Veterans Administration that are aware of, and support, our effort and offered their assistance. The outreach plan developed is a detailed listing of techniques and objectives; administered by veterans, unique to California and offers a high probability of successfully locating and informing veterans of this county's program. Enrollment will be done at the Reno Veterans Administration Hospital with the veteran personally present. This also affords the opportunity for the veteran to become familiar with the facility and it may be, as so many of us have discovered, that seeing other veterans reminds him he is a member of a unique fraternity. This approach further eliminates the additional tier of a Veterans Service Office submitting applications and the potential for delays and inaccuracies. Additionally, this eliminates the need for Sierra County Veterans Program personnel, and individual veterans, to attempt to complete the enrollment process directly, using Form 1010EZ, without sufficient ability to navigate the V.A. system, to track and prod submitted applications and the necessary administrative support of the V.A.

The Sierra County Veterans Program does not require an office location; rather, veterans who contact us will be personally met by one of our members. Also, if necessary, transportation for a veteran to the Reno V.A. for the purpose of enrollment will be provided. The committee will develop a plan for transportation

that defines the specific details. Efforts will be made to continue to expand the list of Sierra County veterans. These individuals can then be contacted and informed of our program so they might assist in locating those veterans that may benefit from our service. If this program is approved by the Board of Supervisors the defined Outreach Program and public awareness tasks will be assigned to committee members and a launch date established.

CONCLUSION: We, the members of this committee, sincerely thank the Sierra County Board of Supervisors for acknowledging our veterans and for the opportunity to address the question of veterans' services. Recognizing and assisting our veterans has the additional collateral benefit of contributing, in many ways, to the general wellbeing of Sierra County. And, it's the right thing to do.

Committee members, Sierra County Veterans Program: Paul Roen, Jim Beard, Darden Bynum, Irv Christensen, Don Yegge and Paul Bianco.

Reviewed by the committee on 20 April 2016.