

**Testimony to Combined House and Senate  
Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee**

**John A. Brenner Chairman  
State Veterans Commission**

Chairmen Vulakovich, Costas, Barrar and Saino and Members of both the House and Senate Committee of Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee.

Thank you for the invitation to attend this meeting and join with the leadership of the Pa. Veterans War Council to discuss some of the things that are going on with our respective Organizations. I believe our great State is very fortunate to have such a dedicated group of Veterans that volunteer to help other Veterans .

The Commission members as you well know consists of the leadership of Veterans Service Organizations and the County Directors. We presently have scheduled meetings six times a year and Committee meetings as is deemed necessary.

A. Our members assist in the Veterans Trust Fund applications along with Staff of the DMVA. We have just completed reviewing approximately one-hundred and five application requests. I would like to quickly go over the eligibility criteria to receive consideration for a Grant. There are two types of applicants . One being a 501c-3 Tax exempt group ,Statewide Charitable Organization/ Veterans Service Organization.

The second being County Director of Veterans Affairs. Areas considered are Homelessness ,Post Tramatic Stress Disorder, Employment & Workforce Development Initiatives, Veterans Outreach, Veterans Court and others.

They are graded on their Mission to serve Veterans, Partnerships, Planning, Administration and Budget .This year the total value of the Grants will be approximately \$400,000 for Group one and \$150,000 for group two. Funding is through donations from multiple Organizations, Individuals , Driver's License and Registration Renewables –(may choose to donate three dollars) and for the sale of Honoring our Vets License Plates.

- B. One of the programs we are responsible for is determining need for the Pa. Veterans Real Estate Tax Exemption. A committee was formed to investigate the Five Acre Standing motion that limited acreage exemption for up to five acres. On the recommendation of the Committee, The Commission at our February meeting voted to remove the standing motion and not limit the acreage. As a result of that action and lots of discussion, another committee was formed to go over the determination of need, rules and guidelines of the Real Estate Tax Exemption for Pa. Veterans. Our first meeting was recently held along with staff of the Department of Veterans Affairs. A follow-up meeting will be required to finalize these rules and regulations, which will then be presented to the State Veterans Commission for approval.

These Committee Meetings are time consuming but very important for the fair and equitable treatment of Pennsylvania's Veterans.

- C. An area of concern by the Commission is the operation, maintenance and repairs to the Pennsylvania Veterans Memorial at Indiantown Gap National Cemetery. Just a little history on the Memorial. Back in 1988, ACT 60 established a fund to be administered by the Pennsylvania Veterans Memorial Commission. Revenues were to come from the State General Fund along with public and private donations. These funds were expended to erect the monument to Pennsylvania Veterans who served in armed conflicts in which the United States was a participant. Act 63 followed in 2002 expanding the use of this fund to operation and maintenance of the memorial. I believe the Veterans Memorial Commission was disbanded at that time and the State Veterans Commission assumed the responsibility of administration of the Memorial Trust Fund. No money has been appropriated for the memorial since 2001 when it was dedicated. We have had to rely on donations to keep it going. Now donations have dwindled to less than \$25,000.00 over the past five years. Balance in the fund as of December 2015 was \$203,234.93. Operation and maintenance runs about \$35,000.00. Right now we need about one million for structural repairs.

We support the Governor' Executive Budget in the Capitol Budget requesting 3.6 million for these repairs. Channel 27 recently visited the Memorial and hopefully that call for support along with the budget request will help us maintain the Veterans Memorial at the Gap in the manner needed to show appreciation to Pennsylvania Veterans and their families.

On behalf of our Commission I would like to let you know that the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs under the direction of the Acting Adjutant General Anthony J. Carrelli, the Deputy Adjutant General Jerry Beck and his Staff at the Office of Veterans Affairs are doing a fantastic job serving and really caring about the concerns of our Veterans. The support they give us is really appreciated.

We are looking forward to working with your Committees in the upcoming months on issues that concern all Veterans.

Thank you.