

**PENNSYLVANIA STATE VETERANS COMMISSION
LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY
PA SENATE AND HOUSE VAEP COMMITTEES
THURSDAY, MARCH 23, 2017
REMARKS BY JOHN A. BRENNER**

GOOD AFTERNOON CHAIRPERSONS AND MEMBERS OF THE VAEP COMMITTEES SENATE AND HOUSE. THE 2016 VETERANS DAY AT THE CAPITOL WAS A GREAT SUCCESS. THANK YOU FOR COMING TO OUR BREAKFAST MEETING AND FOR HOSTING US IN YOUR CHAMBERS AND OFFICES. WE LOOK FORWARD TO MORE OF THESE EVENTS.

THANK YOU FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY TO UPDATE YOU ON SOME OF THE THINGS THE STATE VETERANS COMMISSION HAS ON ITS PLATE. IT IS A TREMENDOUS HONOR TO REPRESENT THE 16 ORGANIZATIONS ON THE COMMISSION. I SEE OUR PURPOSE AS REPRESENTING AND HEARING THE OPINIONS AND CONCERNS OF OUR NEARLY 900,000 VETERANS IN PENNSYLVANIA. WE HAVE A NUMBER OF ACTIVE COMMITTEES AND I WOULD LIKE TO GO OVER THEM WITH YOU AT THIS TIME. I KNOW YOU HAVE INTEREST IN THE STATE REAL ESTATE TAX EXEMPTION PROGRAM. OUR COMMITTEE HAS PRESENTED ITS' RESULTS OF LAST YEARS' MEETINGS CHAIRED BY NICK TAYLOR. WE SAT DOWN WITH THE DMVA STAFF, WHICH CONSISTED OF DEPARTMENT LEADERSHIP, DMVA LEGAL STAFF, AND EMPLOYEES INVOLVED WITH THE EXECUTION OF THE PROGRAM. THOSE RESULTS WERE AS FOLLOWS:

**STATE VETERANS COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS
DISABLED VETERANS' RETX EXEMPTION PROGRAM**

Pa.C.S. Title 51, Chapter 89

PA Const. art. VIII & 2 (vi)

LEGISLATIVE MODIFICATIONS THAT REQUIRES CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT:

- 1. GRANT ELIGIBILITY TO THE SURVIVING SPOUSES OF KILLED IN ACTION (KIA) SERVICE MEMBERS.**
- 2. ELIMINATE WARTIME SERVICE REQUIREMENT**

- A. THIS WILL OPEN ELIGIBILITY UP TO A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF VETERANS FROM 1976-1990 THAT ARE CLASSIFIED AS PEACETIME SERVICE.**

LEGISLATIVE MODIFICATIONS THAT DO NOT REQUIRE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT:

- 1. REPEAL THE PORTION OF ACT 161 OF 2006 THAT EFFECTS 8904 (a) (1)**
- 2. AMEND 8903 TO REQUIRE COUNTY BOARDS OF ASSESSMENT TO RECOGNIZE THE DATE STAMP ON THE CLAIM AS THE DATE THE EXEMPTION IS EFFECTIVE.**

REGULATORY MODIFICATIONS:

- 1. ADOPTION OF THE TABLE USING AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY DATA AND APPLYING A 1.61 MULTIPLIER TO INCREASE THE PRESUMPTIVE AMOUNT FOR COUNTIES WITH A HIGHER DISBURSEMENT OF WEALTH.**
- 2. ADD DEFINITION OF "HOUSEHOLD INCOME."**
- 3. CONSIDER "HOUSEHOLD INCOME" VERSUS ONLY APPLICANT/VETERANS' INCOME.**

PROGRAM GUIDANCE MODIFICATIONS:

- 1. VACATE 5 ACRE RULE – COMPLETED**
- 2. ADOPTION OF A SINGLE FORM FOR BOTH NEW AND RENEWAL APPLICATIONS WITH APPROVED FORMATTING CHANGES (MA-VA FORM 40) – COMPLETED.**

ACT 66

ANOTHER COMMITTEE ACTIVELY WORKING IS OUR ACT 66 (SERVICE OFFICER GRANT PROGRAM), UNDER THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF SAM PETROVICH. OUR GOAL IS TO INCREASE FUNDING EACH BUDGET YEAR, THROUGH FISCAL YEAR 2020-2021 AND MAINTAIN A SEPARATE LINE ITEM IN THE DMVA BUDGET FOR THIS PROGRAM. THIS PROGRAM IS ONE THAT HELPS THOSE ENTITLED TO BENEFITS THE PROPER WAY TO APPLY AND ANSWER QUESTIONS, WITH THE HELP OF A TRAINED AND EFFICIENT SERVICE OFFICER AT NO EXPENSE TO THE VETERAN.

WE HAVE BEEN REACHING OUT TO THE SENATE AND HOUSE WITH THE COMMITTEE' PRESENTATION THAT HAS BEEN PUT TOGETHER TO EXPLAIN AND ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS.

I DO NOT BELIEVE ANY OF YOU HAVE ACTUALLY SEEN THIS AS MOST HAVE BEEN PRESENTED TO YOUR AIDES. ON APRIL 19 BEGINNING AT 8:00 A.M. A TRADITIONAL BREAKFAST DONATED BY THE VETERANS WAR COUNCIL, WILL KICKOFF THIS PRESENTATION TO THE HOUSE AND SENATE VAEP COMMITTEES, ALONG WITH INVITATIONS TO ALL THE LEGISLATORS IN THE COMMONWEALTH. WE WILL BE AVAILABLE TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS.

STATE VETERANS HOMES:

THE COMMISSION ALSO SUPPORTS EFFORTS TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF STATE VETERANS HOMES AND/OR PROVIDE SUITABLE ALTERNATIVES TO IMPROVE THE STATE SYSTEM OF CARING FOR AGING VETERANS. AS AN EXAMPLE SOME VETERANS MAY SEE OUR OUTSTANDING STATE VETERANS HOMES AS LOCATED TOO FAR FROM THEIR FAMILIES AND FRIENDS TO MOVE INTO THEM. ONE OF THE ALTERNATIVES BEING LOOKED AT COULD INCLUDE UTILIZING EXISTING SENIOR CARE AND RETIREMENT CENTERS CLOSER TO THEIR HOMES. THIS MAY INCLUDE COUNTY NURSING HOMES.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION:

WE ARE ALSO REWORKING THE WAY WE RECOGNIZE THOSE WHO HAVE SERVED ON THE COMMISSION AND THOSE WHO HAVE IN ONE WAY OR THE OTHER DEMONSTRATED EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE TO PENNSYLVANIA' VETERANS. WE HAVE PREPARED GUIDELINES FOR THESE AWARDS AND THE PROCESS FOR SUBMITTING NOMINATIONS.

WE HAVE APPOINTED MEMBERS OF OUR COMMISSION OR THEIR APPOINTED REPRESENTATIVES TO SERVE ON FIVE COMMITTEES OF THE GOVERNOR' ADVISORY COUNCIL. THESE FIVE COMMITTEES ARE:

- 1. JUDICIARY COMMITTEE**
- 2. HEALTH & BEHAVIORAL SERVICE COMMITTEE**
- 3. EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT/WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**
- 4. AGING COMMITTEE**
- 5. WOMEN VETERAN COMMITTEE**

OUR HOPE IS THAT BY CREATING THESE COMMITTEES WE WILL CREATE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING AND IMPLEMENTION OF VETERANS ISSUES.

IT MUST BE UNDERSTOOD THAT OUR VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATION LEADERS HAVE A RESPONSIBILTY TO SERVE THEIR OWN ORGANIZATIONS. THIS RESPONSIBILTY COULD AND ACTUALLY DOES, KEEP THEM FROM PUTTING IN THE TIME THAT IS NECESSARY TO WORK ON THE COMMISSIONS' COMMITTEES. TO HELP THIS SITUATION WE ASK FOR THEM TO APPOINT A KNOWLEDGABLE DESIGNEE TO SERVE IN THEIR PLACE. THIS WOULD HELP INSURE THAT WE HAVE EFFECTIVE DISCUSSION AND COMMITTEE WORK ON A FULL RANGE OF ISSUES THAT IMPACTS VETERANS LIVES. KEEP IN MIND, THESE ARE ALL VOLUNTEERS.

ON ANOTHER CONCERN, AFTER NINE MONTHS OF WAITING FOR MEMBER-AT-LARGE APPOINTMENTS TO THE COMMISSION, WE HAVE FINALLY RECEIVED THE NAMES OF THE APPOINTED. UNFORTUNATELY QUESTIONS ON THE PROCESS OF THESE APPOINTMENTS CAME UP AND AFTER CONTACT OF THE COMMISSION MEMBERS, FIFTEEN MEMBERS OUT OF EIGHTEEN VOTED IN FAVOR OF THE TAG GOING TO THE GOVENOR AND ASKING HIM THAT THOSE APPOINTMENTS BE PLACED ON HOLD IN ORDER TO GIVE US TIME TO GO OVER THE PROCESS.

YOU HAVE SEEN US IN YOUR OFFICES PROMOTING OUR PRIORITIES. WE PLAN TO VISIT YOU AGAIN TO URGE YOU AND YOUR FELLOW LEGISLATORS TO MOVE ON THESE IMPORTANT PRIORITIES, TO SUPPORT PENNSYLVANIA' VETERANS. OUR COMBINED VETERANS MEMBERSHIP THANKS YOU FOR YOUR PAST SUPPORT. WE RECOGNIZE THAT WE SHARE A COMMON BOND WITH YOU AS LAWMAKERS, WHICH IS TO PROVIDE THE BEST POSSIBLE SERVICE AND SUPPORT TO OUR VETERANS AND THEIR LOVED ONES.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE TO OUR STATE AND SPECIFICALLY TO OUR VETERANS.