

**PENNSYLVANIA STATE VETERANS COMMISSION
LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY
PA HOUSE VAEP COMMITTEE
MONDAY, February 11, 2019
REMARKS BY SAMUEL PETROVICH**

Good morning Mister Chairman and members of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee.

I want to thank the committee for the opportunity to speak today, in reference to the State Veterans Council (SVC) and its mission regarding the needs and care of the Veterans in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

STATE VETERANS COMMISSION

The composition of the Pennsylvania State Veterans Commission mandated by Title 51. There are 21 members that include: The Adjutant General (TAG) Major General Tony Carrelli, the Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs (DAG) Major General (Retired) Eric Weller, four Members at Large, who are appointed by the Governor, and the State Commander, Commandant, or President of the following veterans' organizations: American Legion, American Veterans (Am Vets), Blinded Veterans Association, Catholic War Veterans of the United States of America, Disabled American Veterans, Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America, Marine

Corps League, Military Order of the Purple Heart, State Association of County Directors of Veterans Affairs, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Italian American War Veterans of the United States, The Vietnam Veterans of America, American Ex-Prisoners of War, Keystone Paralyzed Veterans Association, Military Officers Association, and The Korean War Veterans Association.

There are currently four active committees within the SVC. My priority as Chairman is for the SVC, to be an active participant in advising the Adjutant General, in suggesting legislation to the Governor. Therefore, I think it worthwhile to explain what these committees are and why they are important. As the SVC is currently adjusting its duties and responsibilities, I will be testifying today about a work in progress.

ACT 66 COMMITTEE

The first committee is the Act 66 Committee. The committee was originally created to assist the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) with drafting guidelines for the Veterans Service Officer Grant Program, which was created by Act 66 of 2007.

One of this committee's key tasks is to ensure the program is maximizing the usage of taxpayer funds. It will concentrate on several different areas, starting with the improvement of metrics used to measure grantee performance under the

program. This will result in enhanced grantee reporting procedures that will allow for more in-depth review of the programs overall performance, thereby allowing the SVC to provide more focused recommendations to The Adjutant General regarding the administration of the program.

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

The second committee is the Legislative Committee. Its' role is to research and develop legislative proposals. These proposals will focus on the health and welfare of Pennsylvania veterans and their families. This committee will then make recommendations to the SVC and, if approved by the SVC, the proposals will be presented to The Adjutant General for further consideration and possible action. The committee also works with the Offices of Veterans Affairs (OVA) and Policy, Planning and Legislation (PPL) to ensure the SVC is kept abreast of proposed or pending legislation affecting veterans and their families.

PENSION & RELIEF/ GRAVE MARKING/CEMETERY COMMITTEE

The third committee is the Pension & Relief/Grave Marking/Cemetery Committee. This committee carries out the functions of the SVC set forth in Section 1704(2) of Title 51, which requires the SVC to make investigate and make recommendations to DMVA regarding the DMVA's

administration of the laws providing for the payment of pensions and relief to veterans, the marking of graves of veterans and the selection, acquisition, and maintenance of State military cemeteries.

REAL ESTATE TAX EXEMPTION COMMITTEE

This fourth committee focuses on the administration of the Disabled and Paralyzed Veterans Real Estate Tax Exemption Program. This committee carries out the duties of the SVC set forth in Section 8904 of Title 51. It, among other things, sets the standard for determining need for the exemption.

This committee is currently developing recommendations to The Adjutant General for legislative changes to Title 51 that will make all veterans who die in the Line of Duty and not just those Killed in Action (KIA) eligible for a real estate tax exemption in Pennsylvania. An additional recommendation will be to remove the requirement of serving during wartime.

The Committee conducted a survey of the implementation of the current real estate tax exemption law in 2018 and discovered the following: 1) some tax assessment authorities prorate, many do not; and 2) many tax authorities do not properly backdate the tax relief. The committee's position is that the system should be fair and equitable to all veterans who receive tax relief and should not be dependent on the taxing authority.

CLOSING REMARKS

We must not forget the service and sacrifice of our Veterans'. Without such selflessness, the citizen of this Commonwealth would not be able to enjoy the great freedoms and liberties we all cherish.

I thank you again for allowing me the time today to speak on the needs of our Veterans.