

LaSalle County Veterans Assistance Commission

**Superintendent
Christa Hammers**



**Assistant Superintendent
Lissa Olson**

Office of the Governor
State Capital Room 207
Springfield, IL 62706

December 21, 2023

Governor Pritzker,

As required by 330 ILCS 45 (The Military Veterans Assistance Act) I am submitting the Veterans Assistance Commission of LaSalle County Annual Report for the Fiscal Year ending November 30, 2023.

Over the past year, the office has provided many events for our clients. Some of which included: VA S.A.V.E training, Caregiver Support training, Hines Healthcare, Flutes for Veterans, MidWest Shelter for Homeless Veterans, Senior Resource Group and our PTSD Support Group. We also put on our annual large event: the Veterans Expo. This year we partnered with the area TBM Avenger Airshow and had a fantastic turnout. We also took part in the Central States Baseball Tournament and showcased 14 of our area Veterans to walk-out with the teams. In total, our office had just under 400 Veterans attend our events and we continue to try and reach more Veterans by being active on the local radio stations, social media, and our website.

Although the VA has an expanded wait time for claims to be processed of up to 12 months, I am extremely proud of our team and the work we put into helping our clients. I am honored to report that our submitted claims have brought in monetary benefits for Veterans and their families totaling \$7,347,603.80. This number is only for the calendar year of 2023. In 2024, we will begin again and make every effort to be as successful as this last year.

We continue to push further education with our staff so we can stay up to date with the new legislature and best practices for our clients. Our office has had one new Veterans Service Officer (VSO) complete the Basic Benefits Course and get accredited and one staff member take the Intro Course to better her understanding of what we do and familiarize herself with the VA terms that are asked to better assist our clients. We also continue to attend annual training courses and meetings-both state and nation-wide. Our office has attended the Illinois Association of County Officials (IACO), Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA), Illinois Association of County Veterans Assistance Commissions (IACVAC), and National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO) conferences this past year and will continue to do so in the future.

Even though I am extremely proud of my team and the number of monetary benefits we were able to bring in, and the education we have received, I am even more proud of the Events and Programs that we have offered to our Veterans and Families. In 2023, we have participated in Operation Green light and handed out over 200 green light bulbs for Veterans Day, created the Veterans Giving Tree Event – where we connected with the LaSalle Veterans Home and the community to be sure every Veteran had a gift this Christmas, decorated the

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windows at the LaSalle Veterans Home for the holiday season for the 4th year in a row and brought Santa to our office for our Veterans with little ones. We have also started on programs for assisting our Veterans with PTSD/mental health. Our office still facilitates a workout program with the help of local gyms, and we help in paying for Service Dog training, but now we have begun working with a local horse ranch and bring even more activities and programs to our Veterans in 2024.

Our office not only offers claims assistance, programs, and events- we also assist Veterans in their time of need. Whether it is a one-time event or monthly occurrence. In 2023, we have paid claims for direct financial assistance totaling \$21,824.32 via vouchers to vendors- for either rent or utilities payments. It is this office's aim to not only see these Veterans and make sure they are receiving every benefit they are eligible for, but also connect them with other community resources that may be able to further assist them. In 2023, we were able to assist 4 Veterans with VA benefit claims to get their income to a level where they no longer need monthly assistance, and 2 Veterans are no longer homeless/nearly homeless.

The goal of the LaSalle County Veterans Assistance Commission has always been, and will continue to be, that of assisting our Veterans and their Families in every way possible. Our office has provided great benefits for the county and our Veterans this past year and we will continue to do so for years to come. It is our honor to serve our nations hero's and their families, and we will continue to expand our services in the hopes of filling needs of even a greater number of Veterans.

Respectfully submitted,

Christa Hammers

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Superintendent

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