



LASALLE COUNTY VETERANS ASSISTANCE COMMISSION

# ANNUAL REPORT

## FISCAL YEAR 2025

A Annual Overview of the LaSalle County VAC Events, Claims and Programs.



Advocating for Veterans and their Families.

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## LASALLE COUNTY VETERANS ASSISTANCE COMMISSION

# OFFICE SUMMARY

## OVERVIEW

The staff at the LaSalle County Veterans Assistance Commission (VAC) offer comprehensive support for Veterans and their Families by assisting them with benefit applications and clarifying complex VA decisions to secure earned benefits.

## IMPACT STATEMENT

By assisting veterans and their families with benefits, the LaSalle County VAC brings in compensation payments to those who are eligible. This in turn allows for Veterans and their Families to stay in their communities and helps the area in which they reside thrive.

## FISCAL YEAR 2025 RESULTS

In fiscal year 2025, the LaSalle County VAC netted over \$10.7 million dollars in benefits paid directly to our Veterans and their Families. The office also assisted in paying \$8,725 in rent/utility payments for Veterans in need. Overall, the office has increased payouts to Veterans by over \$33.9 Million since 2022.

## PARTNERSHIPS

The LaSalle County VAC not only assisted Veterans and their Families financially, we also hosted, created and held events/programs that benefited our Veterans as well. This year we again partnered with Hines VA Medical Center, Veteran Readiness & Employment (VR&E), and provided a space for a counselor from the Aurora Vet Center. We continue to partner with a local food pantry and Midwest Shelter for Homeless Veterans to assist those that may need help with non-perishable items.

## FUTURE GOALS

The goal of the LaSalle County VAC 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 look for ways to continue our mission for years to come.

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# STAFF

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## Christa Hammers- USAF Veteran

### Superintendent

- Employed at LCVAC since 2017
- Acquired CVA in 2022
- Superintendent since June 2022
- IACVAC Liason to IDVA
- 2024 "40 under 40" Award Recipient



## Lissa Olson

### Assistant Superintendent

- Employed at LCVAC since 2019
- Spouse of a Veteran
- IVAC Ambassador/Board Member since 2024
- Secretary of IACVAC
- IVAC Volunteer of the Year 2023
- 2024 "Cornerstone Award" Recipient



## Emily Hackler

### Veterans Service Officer (Outreach VSO)

- Employed at LCVAC since 2022
- Accredited 2023
- Daughter of Veteran
- Completed Social Media Studies Course - 2025



## Kelli Reitgraf

### Administrative Assistant

- Employed at LCVAC since January 2023
- Completed Basic Benefits Course
- Niece of Veteran
- Completed Notary Certificate - 2025

The LCVAC has a current vacancy for one VSO position that will likely be filled after Jan 1, 2026.

# Measuring Progress

Claims processing has continued to be approximately a 12 month wait time from start of the claims process until decision is made with Veterans Affairs. Even with that, our office was still able to secure over \$10.7 million dollars in direct benefit payouts for our Veterans and Families. Below is a break down of number claim type submitted by the last 3 fiscal years and the total payout to Veterans/Families for that year.

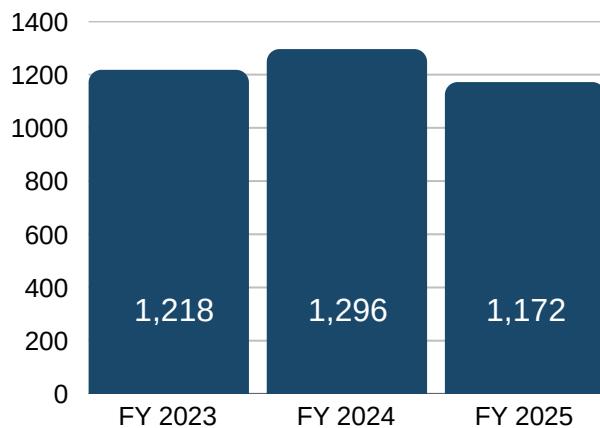
FY 2025	FY 2024	FY 2023
Total Forms: 2,234	Total Forms: 2,331	Total Forms: 2,325
Compensation: 376	Compensation: 381	Compensation: 439
Pension: 24	Pension: 8	Pension: 43
Survivors Pension: 0	Survivors Pension: 3	Survivors Pension: 4
Appeals: 388	Appeals: 217	Appeals: 146
Healthcare: 97	Healthcare: 134	Healthcare: 102
TOTAL PAYOUT: \$10,774,662	TOTAL PAYOUT: \$10,574,006.26	TOTAL PAYOUT: \$7,347,603.80

Since 2017, the LCVAC has brought in more than \$43,584,249 to our Veterans and Families.

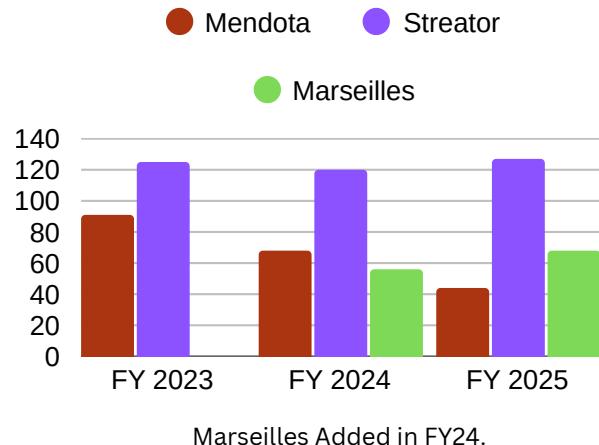
Office visits and phone calls are one of the many ways we connect with our Veterans/Families. These numbers have increased significantly since our move to Peru (just South of the LaSalle VA Clinic). Our Veterans have repeatedly stated that our location is much more convenient and friendly than our previous Ottawa location. We also offer outreach for our Veterans/Families that may not be able to drive to Peru. Below is the office visit, phone call and walk-in numbers for the past 3 fiscal years, along with our outreach numbers for each location- Marseilles, IL has been added since FY24.

## Office Visits per Fiscal Year

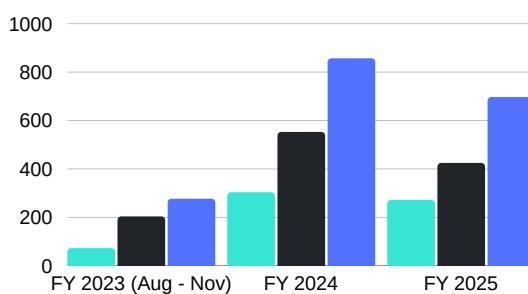
In Person Visits - Peru (Main Office)



In Person Visits - Outreach

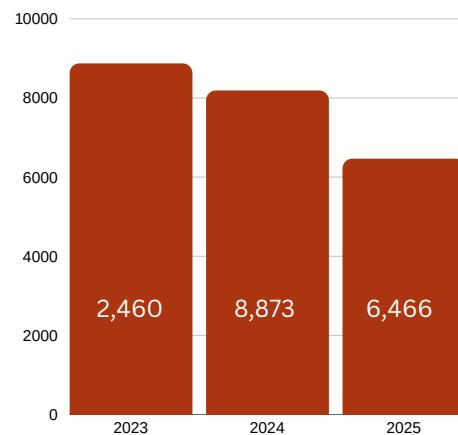


APPT Made   Questions   TOTAL



**Total Number of Walk-Ins FY 2025: 697**

Our office just started tracking the number of walk-in clients/questions a month in August 2023.



**Number of Phone Calls Per FY**

# Events/Programs

Not only does the LaSalle County Veterans Assistance Commission assist Veterans and Families with finding and applying for benefits- we also host, create and partake in events for our Veterans to connect with resources and build programs to assist our Veterans with needs that may otherwise go unmet.

## Fiscal Year 2025 Events:

- Fox Valley Senior Center Resource Fair
- Streator Church Presentation
- Springfield Legislative Trip
- IVCC Women's Day Panel
- Hines VA Caregiver Resource Fair
- Veterans Expo 2025
- OSF Vendor Fair
- Pistol Shrimp Game - July 2025
- Warriors & Guardians 5K
- Bureau County Metro Center Resource Fair
- Hines Support Event - LaSalle CBOC
- Presentation at Ottawa Sunrise
- Senator Rezin Resource Fair
- Naplate Safety Day
- Utica Veterans Day Parade
- YMCA (Peru) Resource Fair
- YMCA (Streator) Resource Fair
- Operation Green Light
- Pearl Harbor Day Ceremony - Peru
- Veterans Giving Tree (Over 450 gifts to 90 LaSalle Veterans Home Residents)
- Christmas Window Painting (decorated windows at LaSalle Veterans Home)
- Vets Visit with Santa (Vietnam Veteran gifted time dressed as Santa for photos) (Dec 2024)



## We also would like to thank all who donated to our office this year:

- Bill Walsh Automotive
- Holy Family School
- Irina Allison - APEX Real Estate

Contributions go towards our Events and Programs.

# Education

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 VSO complete the Advanced Appeals Training and one start the Certified Veterans Advocacy Training in FY25. 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) Conference, Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) Conference, Illinois Association of County Veterans Assistance Commissions (IACVAC) Trainings, and the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO) Trainings this past year and will continue to do so in the future.

# Local Involvement

The LaSalle County VAC prides ourselves on keeping in touch with our local community. We have partnered with many and attend local meetings to have a better understanding of what needs our residents have. Below are the committees and agencies in which our office takes part in:

- Streator Chamber
- Mendota Chamber
- Ottawa Chamber
- Illinois Valley Area Chamber
- LaSalle County Healthy Aging
- Human Service Transportation Planning (HSTP)
- North Central Area Transit (NCAT)
- Perfectly Flawed Resource Network
- Radio Station Interviews/Advertisements
- Bureau, LaSalle, Marshall, Putnam Resource Network
- Arukah Advisory Committee
- Goodwill Veteran Resource Group
- LaSalle, Kankakee, Will, Grundy and Kendall County Mental Health Coalition
- Connect 4 Alliance
- Veterans Advisory Council - LaSalle VA Home
- Congresswoman Lauren Underwood - Veteran Advisory Council
- Illinois Veteran Advisory Committee

Our staff also is part of our state association (Illinois Association of County Veteran Assistance Commissions) Lissa Olson, our Assistant Superintendent is the Secretary of the Association as well as the co-chair of education team and on the legislative committee. Christa Hammers, the Superintendent is the liaison for the Association to the Illinois Veteran Advisory Committee and assists with design needs.

# Financial Aid

The LaSalle County Veterans Assistance Commission 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 FY 2025, our office has paid claims for direct financial aid totaling \$8,725 via vouchers to vendors. These payments are to assist Veterans with either rent/mortgage 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.

Community resources our office continues to work with:

- Business Employment Skills Team (BEST), Inc - resume writing
- North Central Area Transit (NCAT)- rides for appointments
- TriCounty - Bill pay/clothing/food vouchers
- MidWest Shelter Freedom Commissary - household goods
- LiHeap- Bill payments (utilities)
- Social Security- Benefit payments/Unemployable Veterans
- Ottawa and Peru Food Pantries- Assist Veterans with non-perishable food items

# Looking Ahead

The LaSalle County Veterans Assistance Commission will continue to strive to do everything we can for our Veterans and Families. It is our aim to keep education and knowledge a priority to best assist any client. In the future it is our mission to keep our office effective and make sure that anyone who walks in our doors leaves more understanding of benefits and resources available to them. We will continue to hold events, create programs and reach out to our Veterans/Families that may not be able to make it into our main office. It is our honor to serve our Nation's heroes and their families, and we will continue to expand our services in the hopes of filling needs of even a greater number of Veterans.



Above: Superintendent Christa Hammers had the privilege of flying in a TBM Avenger over the Pearl Harbor Day Celebration hosted at Southshore Boat Club in Peru. Pictured taxing, with her kids and in flight.

## Legislation to Watch

H.R. 815 - To amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements relating to the eligibility of veterans to receive reimbursement for emergency treatment furnished through the Veterans Community Care program, and for other purposes.

H.R. 1139 - This bill imposes fines on individuals for soliciting, contracting for, charging, or receiving any unauthorized fee or compensation with respect to the preparation, presentation, or prosecution of any claim for Department of Veterans Affairs benefits. The attempted commission of such offenses is also punishable by fine.

H.R. 1822 - To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the review of claims for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs..

S. 106 - To amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to award grants to States to improve outreach to veterans, and for other purposes.

Illinois House Bill 1352 (HB 1352), introduced in the 2025-2026 session, creates the framework for multi-county Jurisdictional Veterans Assistance Commissions (JVACs), allowing veteran service organizations in adjacent, smaller counties (under 60k population or within a single judicial circuit) to form joint commissions for better resource sharing and expanded veteran support, amending the Military Veterans Assistance Act. The bill allows for pooled funding, shared staff, and unified governance, and includes provisions for existing commissions to merge or remain separate.



Advocating for Veterans & Their Families

815-433-1761  
[www.lasallecountyvac.com](http://www.lasallecountyvac.com)

Prepared by: Christa Hammers, Superintendent  
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