



Monthly Report

# FEBRUARY 2026

PREPARED BY :

CHRISTA HAMMERS  
SUPERINTENDENT

# MEETING AGENDA

2-25-2026

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- I. Call to Order & Salute to the Colors
- II. Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag
- III. Chaplain's Prayer
- IV. Roll Call of Officers
- V. Reading & Approval of Meeting Minutes
- VI. Public Comment
- VII. Superintendent's Report
  - a. Office Activity - January
  - b. Hiring Process for New VSO
- VIII. Old Business
- IX. New Business
  - a. IVCC Scholarship - Approval
- X. For the Good of the Commission
- XI. Closing Prayer
- XII. Adjournment

# Meeting MINUTES

**1/28/26**

## Call to Order & Salute to the Colors

President Andy Ruggerio called the meeting to order at 5:00pm and lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

### Delegates & Alternates Present

Mike Harden - AmLeg - Ottawa / Lance Sires - AmLeg - Marseilles / Greg Stock - AmLeg - Marseilles / Louis Sekula - AmLeg - LaSalle / Gary Graffis - AmVets - Ottawa / John Duback - AmVets - Ottawa / Phil Harth - AmVets - Mendota / Paul Siembab - MarCorpsLeg - Post 078 / Mike Mallie - MarCorpsLeg - Post 078 / Bill Luther - VFW - Ottawa / Kevin Swierkowz - VFW - LaSalle / Tom Troutman - VFW - Mendota / Thaddous Downey - VFW - Marseilles / Kevin Danekas - VFW - Marseilles

### Officers Present

President – Andy Ruggerio  
Vice President – Dennis Znaniiecki - EXCUSED  
Guard – Elton Murphy - EXCUSED  
Chaplain – Ken Troyan

### Employees Present

Christa Hammers – Superintendent  
Lissa Olson - Assistant Superintendent  
Emily Hackler- VSO  
Kelli Rietgraf - Administrative Assistant

# Meeting MINUTES

Approval of December meeting minutes as presented:

Motion by Mike Harden and seconded by Bill Luther. Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Annual Report/Governors Letter as presented:

Motion made by Thad Downey and seconded by Lance Sires. Motion passed unanimously.

## Public Comment

Kevin Danekas will be taking over as alternate for Marseilles VFW/AmLeg. He introduced himself and was happy to be able to assist.

## Superintendent's Report

Christa told the Commission that Kelli was able to wrap over 400 gifts for our Vetans at the LaSalle VA Home. The office was able to drop them off and the Veterans/Staff were grateful.

Christa then discussed that she was able to get the annual report/governor letter online and went over a few key factors.

Christa also discussed that it is property tax season and if you or someone you know needs a benefits letter - please make an appointment. We are booking out, but will get you in before deadline.

Christa and Lissa attended the State Associations Annual winter meetings in Peoria. Lissa was re-elected as the IACVAC Secretary and we congradulate her on another term.

Christa then told the Commission that we are currently working on SOP (Standard Operating Procedures) for the office and each position. We are hoping to have these done by Feb 1 for the job posting date.

Christa then stated that the office is working on the Vendor list for the Veterans Expo in May. If any posts/aux would like to join, please have them reach out to the office.

Christa discussed that Emily is now attending Goodwill Veteran resource meetings/switching off and on from Lissa. Lissa joined a group called Connect 4 Alliance for mental health. These organizations being added makes it where the office is involved in 17 different area organizations.

Christa further discussed that the office is watching a few legislative bills right now and will have more information as it comes about.

Meeting  
MINUTES CONTINUED

Christa stated that the office will be closed Feb 12<sup>th</sup> for Lincoln's Birthday and Feb 16<sup>th</sup> for President's Day.

The office has worked well with the Ottawa Food Pantry - but since the IV Food Pantry is right down the road, we are no longer going to be getting the boxes for our GA Veterans. We will still be getting commissary bags from MSHV.

Christa stated that we mailed out the Post Delegate/Alternate forms come Jan 1<sup>st</sup>. They need to be in-hand no later than March 1<sup>st</sup>.

Christa then reported that we have been able to assist Veterans and Families receive over \$1.3 Million in NEW benefits so far this year. Over \$391 Thousand where we were at this time last year.

Superintendent's report was motioned for approval by Lance Sires and seconded by Thad Downey. Motion passed unanimously.

Old Business

None.

New Business

Christa went over the Statement of Economic Interest forms. Stated all Delegates/Alternates need to complete and turn into Christa by May 1<sup>st</sup>.

For the Good of the Commission

None.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn was made by Phil Harth and seconded by Mike Mallie.  
Motion passed unanimously at 5:30pm.

JANUARY**Office Activity:**

Christa/Emily/Lissa were able to attend a Zoom conference for a new program called the Semper Fi & America's Fund Housing Insecurity Program. They are offering financial assistance with entry into new housing (currently homeless – in need of first month's rent and/or deposit) or eviction prevention (notice of eviction / pay or quit notice is required to be eligible). There is also potential to assist with past evictions debts on a case-by-case basis. This would be if the past debt is a barrier to entry into new housing. The veteran must have served a minimum of 180 days and have a DD214.

It is property tax season and always busy in our office. We do make sure that claims/priority appointments come first, but we caution that there is a wait for appointments right now.

The office posted the VSO position and we were able to get 63 "applications" - of which 21 were complete with all documents needed. We are looking into each applicant and hope to have calls out for interviews by March 6.

The office is currently working on Standard Operating Procedures (SOP). This is in the final stages and awaiting notes from staff to be approved by the board.

Lissa is currently in Springfield discussing Veterans issues with legislators. Christa was able to put together a trifold of the state association annual report for handouts and discussion starters.

Lissa will also be in Washington with the National Association for a leadership conference March 23-26. This will keep our Veterans informed of all legislative issues and roadblocks first-hand.

We are still watching a few legislative bills - particularly HB1352 for the multicounty VACs. We don't have an update on this just yet, but we will hopefully know something in the next coming months.

The VA attempted to impose a "interm final rule" on the rating of a Veterans Service-Connected Condition is impacted by the effectiveness of medication. They have since over-turned this ruling, through the impact of the voices of our Veterans, VSO's and Associations.

Christa and Lissa will be out of office the morning of March 20 for a training day in Will County. We are part of Division 1 in our state and in an attempt to learn what other VAC's do and how they work - we will be joining other VAC's across our division for training/tours of their offices and an area Veteran related office/business. (VA Home/Abe Lincoln Cemetery/Clinics etc)

Our Office  
**EVENTS**

# Office Claims/Program DATA

<b>Office Visits</b>	117	<b>Intent to File</b>	13
<b>Phone</b>	589	<b>Intital Claims</b>	30
<b>Outstation</b>	20	<b>Appeals</b>	20
<b>Mendota</b>	N/A	<b>VA Healthcare</b>	8
<b>Streator</b>	14	<b>Pension/DIC</b>	4
<b>Marseilles</b>	6	<b>Other</b>	132

The VAC tracks things like forms submitted, outreach clients and office visits. The “other” is things such as faxes, emails, mailings, other forms not listed etc. This is done to see where the bulk of our work and effort is done and to show that the claims processes often times take muliple forms to complete correctly.

<b>PTSD GROUP</b>	40	<b>WALK-INS:</b>	80
<b>Flutes</b>	8	<b>APPT MADE:</b>	43
<b>Vet Center</b>	3	<b>QUESTIONS:</b>	37
		<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>131</b>

The office is utilized by other entities to have services. Places such as Hines VA Healthcare, Flutes for Veterans, Peer-led PTSD groups and Senior Resource Meetings are just a few that use our spaces.

Currently we have brought in over **\$2.43 Million** in **NEW** benefits for our Veterans/Families. These numbers are NOT CUMULATIVE and start new each FY. We are over \$611 Thousand above where we were this time in FY25. We continue to see new clients daily and thank all our Veterans and Families for trusting us with their claims process.

### JANUARY Claims Summary

Total Percentage	Date Submitted	Through	MONTHLY	BACKPAY	ANNUAL	
100% P&T SMC	2/28/2025	Dec-26	\$ 4,567.97	\$ 17,223.98	\$ 72,039.62	
100% P&T	11/19/2025	Dec-26	\$4,158.17	\$5,414.00	\$55,312.04	
DIC	10/6/2025	Dec-26	\$1,699.36	\$6,658.57	\$27,050.89	
90%	9/29/2025	Dec-26	\$2,362.30	\$6,958.22	\$35,305.82	
Dependent	1/9/2026	Dec-26	\$72.00	\$288.00	\$1,152.00	
Dependent	1/9/2026	Dec-26	\$252.00	\$1,008.00	\$4,032.00	
DIC	10/20/2025	Dec-26	\$1,699.36	\$3,352.43	\$23,744.75	
Burial	10/20/2025	Dec-26	\$0.00	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00	
100%	10/22/2025	Dec-26	\$4,767.99	\$4,080.92	\$61,296.80	
100% P&T	2/18/2025	Dec-26	\$4,628.12	\$26,011.50	\$81,548.94	
70%	12/17/2025	Dec-26	\$2,226.45	\$0.00	\$26,717.40	
100% P&T	10/23/2024	Dec-26	\$4,078.45	\$35,817.33	\$84,758.73	
60%	10/21/2025	Dec-26	\$1,566.02	\$3,089.95	\$21,882.19	
90%	1/2/2026	Dec-26	\$2,900.30	\$0.00	\$34,803.60	
20%	12/18/2025	Dec-26	\$356.66	\$0.00	\$4,279.92	
50%	10/7/2025	Dec-26	\$1,132.90	\$3,758.02	\$17,352.80	
DIC	11/17/2025	Dec-26	\$717.50	\$0.00	\$8,610.00	
Audit	8/28/2025	Dec-26	\$0.00	\$4,941.51	\$4,941.51	
A&A	1/20/2026	Dec-26	\$201.41	\$0.00	\$2,416.92	
100% P&T	8/6/2025	Dec-26	\$3,938.58	\$72,542.01	\$119,804.97	
30%	7/22/2025	Dec-26	\$537.42	\$2,149.68	\$8,598.72	
Dependent	10/23/2025	Dec-26	\$267.19	\$1,603.12	\$4,809.40	
Dependent	5/30/2024	Dec-26	\$131.00	\$2,417.00	\$3,989.00	
100% HB	11/6/2025	Dec-26	\$3,062.10	\$3,062.10	\$39,807.30	
DIC	9/1/2025	Dec-26	\$1,699.36	\$6,658.57	\$27,050.68	
P&T	12/8/2025	Dec-26	\$330.08	\$0.00	\$3,960.96	
100% P&T HB	10/28/2025	Dec-26	\$2,559.30	\$4,080.92	\$34,792.52	
80%	11/6/2025	Dec-26	\$315.70	\$315.70	\$4,104.10	
DIC	11/2/2025	Dec-26	\$717.50	\$0.00	\$8,610.00	
Dependent	11/6/2025	Dec-26	\$65.00	\$0.00	\$780.00	
30%	7/7/2024	Dec-26	\$372.05	\$0.00	\$4,464.60	
50%	9/9/2025	Dec-26	\$624.43	\$1,837.67	\$9,330.83	
80%	4/9/2025	Dec-26	\$2,493.15	\$19,467.38	\$54,785.18	
100% P&T	5/19/2025	Dec-26	\$4,628.12	\$31,640.48	\$87,177.92	
R-dependency back pa	10/5/2023	Dec-26	\$0.00	\$2,901.00	\$2,901.00	
30%	10/29/2025	Dec-26	\$666.47	\$648.42	\$8,646.06	
Dependent	7/7/2024	Dec-26	\$65.00	\$0.00	\$780.00	
40%	1/5/2026	Dec-26	\$702.42	\$0.00	\$8,429.04	
100% HB P&T	9/23/2025	Dec-26	\$4,548.40	\$34,628.88	\$89,209.68	
10%	10/7/2025	Dec-26	\$180.42	\$536.35	\$2,701.39	
Dependent	6/24/2025	Dec-26	\$439.00	\$2,800.00	\$8,068.00	
Dependent	6/1/2025	Dec-26	\$52.00	\$798.00	\$1,422.00	
			<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 65,781.65</b>	<b>\$ 308,689.71</b>	<b>\$ 1,103,469.28</b>
			<b>Year to Date Total</b>	<b>\$ 141,511.35</b>	<b>\$ 733,107.19</b>	<b>\$ 2,436,593.16</b>

New Claims

# OVERVIEW