



**OFFICE OF
BAY COUNTY EXECUTIVE**

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Thomas L. Hickner
County Executive

MEMORANDUM

To: Brian Elder, Chairperson - Ways & Means Committee
From: Tom Hickner - Bay County Executive
Re: Veterans' Affairs
Date: September 26, 2007

BACKGROUND:

At the September 11, 2007 Board meeting, several specific requests were made during public comment concerning Bay County's services and resources on behalf of our Veterans. Our Administration had previously scheduled a meeting with several leaders of various veterans' organizations to discuss matters of mutual concern.

Attached you will find a "Veteran's Briefing Packet" which provides an in-depth review of various local, state and federal resources currently provided to our Veterans and current Michigan laws concerning veterans' services.

Administration is in the process of evaluating and/or drafting specific recommendations on the following policy matters:

- 1. Creation of a Department of Veterans' Affairs.** Act 139 recognizes that the County Executive is to direct and supervise budgeting, procurement, office facilities/equipment, employment, and related management functions ((MCL 45.554(5)(a)).
- 2. Department of Veterans' Affairs Administrative Committee.** Should a Department of Veterans' Affairs be established, the Board of Commissioners is required to appoint a Department of Veterans' Affairs Administrative Committee comprised of 3-5 veterans (MCL 35. 621) This Committee would replace the soldiers' relief commission (MCL 35.622) and may include a County Commissioner. The Committee must confirm the appointment of staff, receives a per diem, and decides about all veterans' relief to be granted from amounts budgeted by Board of Commissioners also including eligible burial expenses, conferences, and assistance to indigent relatives as defined by law.
- 3. 1/10 of a Mill for Veterans' Services.** Act 214 of 1899 and a subsequent court decision, *Lee v Macomb County Board of Commissioners*, 464 Mich 726, 629

NW2d 900 (2001), permits but does not require the Board of Commissioners to levy a millage up to 1/10 of a mill for veterans' services. We are evaluating what the actual millage rate should be to fully fund County of Bay services to our Veterans. In order to levy a millage, this millage rate must be set at the November 13, 2007 Board meeting.

4. **Increased Funding for Soldiers & Sailors Relief Fund.** Act 214 of 1899 also established the Soldiers & Sailors Relief Fund. In FY 2007, \$32,660 was appropriated. Our FY 2008 budget will increase the authorized amount to \$42,660.

5. **Veterans' Counselor.** Our recommended FY 2008 budget will include funding for a Veterans' Counselor, all necessary office related resources including a computer, telephone, fax and office space. Based on current staffing by other organizations, we are recommending the Veterans' Counselor initially be authorized and funded as a part-time position.

6. **Counseling and Mental Health Services.** At last week's meeting, the veterans expressed a desire to have greater access to counseling and mental health services. It had been proposed that the County help accomplish that objective and that the County help them have that service. We stated that was the responsibility of the Bay-Arenac Behavioral Health Authority and that we would be sending a formal communication to the Mental Health Authority urging them to meet with representatives of the veterans organization to develop an ongoing support group effort.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

To be determined.

RECOMMENDATION:

I recommend that this matter be referred to the October Personnel & Judicial Committee.