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DAV DEPARTMENT OF MICHIGAN CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

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Address to Senate Veterans Committee

March 5, 2015

Thursday, 2pm, Farnum Bldg.
123 W. Allegan, Rm 110
Lansing, MI

Good afternoon Senator O'Brien and members of the Senate Veterans, Military Affairs and Homeland Security Committee. Thank you for your invitation to provide testimony on the state of affairs for the Disabled American Veterans, Department of Michigan. For many decades, our Organization has enjoyed a mutually beneficial and professional relationship with the State of Michigan, and looks forward to its continuance.

As a 28-year military veteran I served as a Social Work/Psychology specialist during Vietnam, Clinical Specialist and medic with the Army Guard, and Aeromedical Evacuation Specialist during my first decade of service to my country. Since commissioning in 1982 as an Air Force Health Services Administrator, I have served in national level positions at the Directorate level, as well as Medical Investigation Officer for the Adjutant General and Inspector General of Michigan. These positions, as well as serving New York State's Office of Mental Health as a forensic Psychiatric Nurse, have provided me with unique education, training and experiences to serve in my present capacity. Upon retirement as a Chief, Medical Service Corps officer, and Deputy Director of a national medical training program, I became involved with the VA and the DAV to assist veterans with improving their quality of life. Today, as I complete 40 years of continuous service to my country and its veterans, I am privileged to represent one of the finest Veterans Service Organizations in our nation: The DAV.

DAV is dedicated to a single purpose: Empowering Veterans to Lead High-Quality Lives with Respect and Dignity.

Mission Statement

Since our founding in 1920, we have excelled at veteran's advocacy. We've watched the country change and grow, and we've grown with it. DAV has never wavered in its core mission to fulfill our country's promises to the men and women who served. We invite everyone, veterans and civilian, men and women, young and old, to join us as we stand up for those veterans who risked it all when they stood up for us, our country, and our ideals.

DAV provides leadership and resources to improve the quality of life for veterans and their families in State of Michigan. These efforts serve to support our local communities by generating revenue, creating awareness and engaging in a diversity of support services.

This is accomplished through the implementation of our Vision and Values.

Vision

DAV envisions a strong state of Michigan, where Veterans, Dependents and Survivors achieve their potential through the following:

- Providing free, professional assistance to veterans and their families in obtaining benefits and services earned through military service and provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and other agencies of government.
- Providing outreach concerning its program services to the American people generally, and to disabled veterans and their families specifically.
- Representing the interest of disabled veterans, their families, their widowed spouses and their orphans before Congress, the White House and the Judicial Branch, as well as State and Local Government.
- Extending DAV's mission of hope into communities where these veterans and their families live through a network of State-level Department and Local Chapters.

Values

- We are committed to be a good steward of the State of Michigan and the community resources that are entrusted to our care.
- We will be financially efficient with administrative and department costs, while expecting the same of our partners.
- The DAV Department of Michigan Charitable Foundation also provides annual funding for pre-approved programs that focus on quality veteran services as written in our Vision and Mission Statement. This foundation has been established and approved as a 501c3 program to enhance our capabilities to grow new relationships in fiscal development. Our board was installed during the first quarter of FY15.

The DAV is also pleased to leverage other programs on behalf of Michigan's veterans and their families. DAV operates a fleet of vehicles throughout the state, driven by volunteers, to provide free transportation for injured and ill veterans to VA Medical Centers or Community Based Outpatient Clinics. DAV works with Hospital Service Coordinators, quite often in conjunction with County Veteran Affairs offices, across the state to administer these rides. Many veterans would otherwise be unable to attend their appointments if not for the operation of these vans.

DAV's highly trained and professional National Service Officers routinely provide information seminars to veterans and their families offering "tip of the spear" knowledge about benefits they may be entitled to. We invite you and your colleagues to partner with us at these non-partisan events, as they offer a great opportunity to engage with this very special and deserving segment of our society.

DAV also provides service to veterans in the rural areas of the state by utilizing our Mobile Service Office. Twice a year, the MSO, manned by accredited service officers, will tour historically underserved locations in order to offer face-to-face service. While the vast majority, if not all VA claims work can now be accomplished electronically, some veterans still

appreciate, and even demand, ~~and~~ handshake from those they are trusting to represent their interests.

Speaking of electronically filed claims, DAV aggressively utilizes the Stakeholder's Enterprise Portal (SEP), a paperless electronic tool that greatly expedites the establishment and management of benefit claims. We are also diligent in educating veterans on how to use eBenefits, a platform provided by VA for veterans to file and monitor their claims.

MI DAV is also very interested in continuing our strategic partnership with MVAA to expand rural efforts and training for county level service providers. In our current 2-year service contract we are required to provide equitable service throughout the state predicated upon the Governor's regional model. While we are eager to do this, it is made difficult by other contractual obligations, which challenge us to produce 20 percent more claims than we did the previous year.

The majority of our staff is currently located at high traffic areas such as VA Medical Centers, Community-Based Out Patient Clinics, and County VA offices. As such, if we were to push resources out into the more rural areas on a permanent basis, we anticipate that we would quickly suffer a diminished return on investment as a result of fewer claims being filed and less monetary recoveries being realized for Michigan's veterans and their families. Any budget reductions would severely impact our ability to provide the level of services necessary in this post-war and drawdown period. In fact, we understand the Regional Coordinator Program has had difficulty in being stood up, and has never used \$750K that was allocated for it. Ladies and Gentlemen, the DAV, along with our fellow VSOs, can put that money to use right now, through increased staffing and outreach efforts. The sheer geography of the State of Michigan challenges our limited resources, and any additional funding is always welcome.

Additionally, the DAV wants to emphasize the quality of services provided by the Coalition, rather than quantity of metrics being received. It takes 3 to 5 years for a service officer to become technically proficient. We need the resources to attract career-minded employees who will be incentivized to choose a life of service to their fellow veterans through a fair compensation and benefits package. The current contracted service rate of \$26.40 does not afford us the ability to consistently attract these types of employees AND expand service as required by the service contract. We are currently addressing this very issue with our partners at MVAA and look forward to a mutually beneficial outcome. Any direct positive impact you may have over this matter is appreciated.

In closing, I very much appreciate the opportunity to appear today before the Senate Veterans, Military Affairs, and Homeland Security Committee. Hopefully this brief testimony will provide you with a better understanding of the current mission of the DAV, Department of Michigan. If I may be of further assistance please don't hesitate to ask. I would be grateful to entertain any questions.

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