

VETERANS ISSUES

Service Members and Veterans should be honored for their service and deserve the benefits they have earned and been promised. Veterans experiencing homelessness or who commit suicide are a national tragedy. We urge full funding of the Texas Veterans Commission to support its mission to advocate for and provide superior service to Veterans.

The Texas Democratic Veterans Caucus advocates for policies and programs that:

- Determine the unmet, entitled needs of Veterans to provide those services when and where needed;
- Address Veteran homelessness and unemployment through comprehensive Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Texas Veterans Commission, and community programs;
- Provide focused outreach as well as trauma informed training and treatment to end Veteran suicide;
- Engage Veterans to become actively involved in Democratic politics.

Veterans Services

- Recognize that holistic healthcare encompasses mental and physical health including substance use disorders, and advocate for improving the availability of healthcare services for Veterans throughout Texas;
- Include initial assessments of Veteran's physical and mental health upon separation from Active/Reserve Service, followed by free periodic reassessments and referrals for care needed to include PTSD;
- Strengthen programs for Service Members and their families leaving Active Duty by addressing employment, housing, financial management, healthcare, earned benefits and entitlements, and applying for those services;
- Assess and address the needs of Reserve/Guard members and their Families; and limit their activation to actual and legitimate (i.e., not political) emergencies;
- Fund and provide State benefits comparable to or better than Federal benefits for Reserve/Guard members on State orders;
- Recognize and address the needs of Veterans within historically marginalized communities through specialized training, targeted programs, and oversight;
- Expediently exact access to VA health care and benefits required by the Honoring Our Pact Act, H.R. 3967 (117), that recognizes multiple new illnesses related to "Burn Pit" exposure, incorporates toxic exposures into questionnaires; and expands Agent Orange benefits for high blood pressure and includes additional countries; and
- Support Educational benefit entitlements for all Veterans in Texas.

Veterans Unemployment and Homelessness

- Introduce liaison services for unemployed Veterans offering benefits, healthcare, and training opportunities;
- End homelessness of Veterans through offering affordable supportive housing combined with case management, employment services, and healthcare in coordination with the VA's Continuum of Care (CoC) Programs; and
- Identify every Veteran who is at risk of, or experiencing homelessness to connect them with VA programs for homeless Veterans.

Veterans Suicide

- Improve suicide awareness through public service announcements addressing behaviors of concern and resources for help with specific messaging for Veterans;
- Require counties/regions to identify Veterans who commit suicide, then compile and publish data to determine the extent of the problem locally and within Texas; and
- Mandate all healthcare providers screen Veterans for risk of suicide and homelessness at every contact, document that screening, and make appropriate referrals to VA or community resources.

Veterans Community Engagement

- Support repatriation of Deported Veterans and protect the rights of Veterans' immigrant family members;
- Encourage Veterans to continue to serve using their leadership skills to become politically active especially as candidates or campaign staff and volunteers; and
- Motivate and train Veterans to actively lobby their legislators and local officials for the services to meet the needs of Veterans.