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REP. JARED F. GOLDEN, CHAIR
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ADRIAN COLE
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ADRIA HORN

STATE OF MAINE

ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE
FIRST REGULAR SESSION

COMMISSION TO STRENGTHEN AND ALIGN THE SERVICES PROVIDED TO MAINE'S VETERANS

The Honorable Paul R. LePage, Governor
State of Maine
1 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

November 20, 2015

Dear Governor LePage,

The Commission to Strengthen and Align Services Provided to Maine Veterans, established by Resolve 2015, chapter 48, has been holding meetings this fall in accordance with its charge. In addition to identifying gaps in services between those provided by both state and federal agencies and organizations, the commission is also looking to create awareness of existing programs with components specific to veterans that are administered by state agencies who have a broader purpose. In particular, the commission is interested in learning more about efforts to assist veterans and others recently separated from military service with professional licensure that facilitates gainful and meaningful employment. The commission recognizes that issues and challenges confronting veterans do not exist in a vacuum, but rather, are intrinsically linked. For example, connecting a veteran experiencing homelessness with housing will prove to be more successful long-term if that veteran is also provided services that will result in that veteran's employment.

We respectfully request the opportunity to hear from Commissioner Anne Head of the Department of Professional and Financial Regulation (DPFR), regarding efforts to facilitate issuance of professional licenses to Maine's veterans. Specifically:

- What efforts are occurring today that are specifically targeted at assisting veterans;
- Historically, what has DPFR offered in terms of assistance to veterans or those recently separated from military service (whether required statutorily or not);

- Are there future initiatives planned to help facilitate or expedite the process for veterans seeking professional licensure under the jurisdiction of DPFR;
- Are there categories or types of licenses that veterans tend to seek more than others;
- Are there success stories the department would like to share; and
- Would the department like to offer recommendations on ways in which the commission could assist with efforts specific to veterans?

It is our hope that Commissioner Head will be able to attend the next scheduled meeting of the commission on Wednesday, December 2nd, 2015 in room 437 of the State House. The meeting is slated to begin at 9:00 am and end before 5:00 pm. We would happily accommodate whichever time works best for the Commissioner.

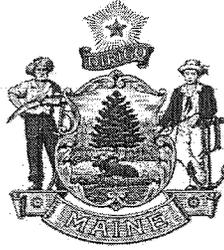
We appreciate your time and consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Ronald F. Collins, Senate Chair

Jared F. Golden, House Chair

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Dear Governor LePage,

The Commission to Strengthen and Align Services Provided to Maine Veterans, established by Resolve 2015, chapter 48, has been holding meetings this fall in accordance with its charge. The commission has been working to identify gaps in services between those provided by both state and federal agencies and organizations. When receiving presentations from service providers and hearing from veterans themselves, the commission has repeatedly heard that lack of transportation is a significant barrier to veterans receiving benefits and services that they have earned and to which they are entitled.

Although transportation is an issue that needs to be addressed on many fronts, we write this letter in regard to transportation of veterans to medical appointments and healthcare services.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) operates community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs) for veterans eligible for VA health benefits. These local facilities allow for expanded access to healthcare closer to veterans' homes, often eliminating the need for travel to Augusta to receive care at the VA hospital at Togus. However, transportation to appointments is not included in the benefits provided to veterans by the VA. Some veteran service organizations provide transportation to Togus, but are limited by their current operating governance to stop at, or deliver veterans to, CBOCs. It seems there may be some opportunity to take advantage of existing resources to connect veterans with this most basic service of treating their health and medical needs.

We respectfully request the opportunity to hear from a representative of the Department of Health and Human Services whom you believe would best address the potential of using existing transportation services administered (or contracted) by the department.

It is our hope that the DHHS representative will be able to attend the next scheduled meeting of the commission on Wednesday, December 2nd, 2015 in room 437 of the State House. The meeting is slated to begin at 9:00 am and end before 5:00 pm.

We appreciate your time and consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Ronald F. Collins, Senate Chair

Jared F. Golden, House Chair



Paul R. LePage
Governor

STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF PROFESSIONAL
AND FINANCIAL REGULATION
35 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE
04333-0035

Anne L. Head
Commissioner

MEMORANDUM

To: Commission to Strengthen and Align Services for Military Veterans

From: Anne L. Head, Director of the DPFR Office of Professional and Occupational Regulation

Subject: Overview of DPFR Outreach Services to Veterans

Date: December 1, 2015

On behalf of the Department of Professional and Financial Regulation, I am happy to provide the following overview of initiatives in which the Department is engaged that are designed to support military veterans who are transitioning to civilian employment in Maine.

Early in his administration, Governor LePage made clear his commitment to support military veterans in their transition to civilian life. Specifically, the Governor signed Public Law Chapter 603 in 2012 to ensure that veterans are given full credit for applicable military training and experience when they apply for occupational licenses from the Department's Office of Professional and Occupational Regulation. In 2013, the Governor signed Public Law Chapter 311 which provides the Department with greater flexibility in evaluating and crediting military experience toward license and continuing education requirements. These statutes also assist veterans and spouses by permitting them to acquire a license by endorsement if they hold a comparable license in another state for the remainder of the term of that license or until a license is obtained in Maine.

Office of Professional and Occupational Regulation

The Office of Professional and Occupational Regulation within the Department is comprised of thirty-six state licensing programs ranging from accounting to veterinary medicine. Half of these regulatory programs are health-related, including pharmacy; social work and counseling; occupational and physical therapy, and the balance focus on trade and construction occupations including electrical licensing, plumbing and boiler and pressure vessel safety.

Although we have always worked with licensure applicants with military training and experience, the enactment of these laws caused us to revisit our licensing processes and establish more effective outreach programs specifically designed to reach military veterans, as described below:

OFFICES LOCATED AT: 76 NORTHERN AVENUE, GARDINER, MAINE

PHONE: (207)624-8511 (VOICE)

TTY users: call Maine Relay 711

FAX: (207)624-8595

- We enlisted a group of military advisors to help us learn how each branch of the military trains its members so that the staff would have a working knowledge of military terminology and documentation that would be helpful as we interacted with military applicants and reviewed and evaluated their experience and training.
- We redesigned our state webpages to prominently feature information explaining the licensure process with contact names, phone numbers and email addresses of licensing and technical staff with military experience in their own backgrounds.
- OPOR staff members with technical expertise in certain occupations were tasked with working collaboratively to develop user-friendly informational material for veterans about how to obtain a license in those fields that require a state license.
- We partnered with the Department of Labor and its career center staff to participate in local and regional job fairs focused on military veterans. Although we don't offer employment opportunities, our tables are staffed by experienced technical staff who provide assistance and guidance to military veterans who want to obtain a particular state license.
- We now waive any examination fee when an examination is required.

License Categories in Demand:

The licensure interests of veterans vary based on the military branch in which veterans served but many of the veterans who have contacted the Office seek information on the following license categories:

Electrician, Plumber, Oil or Solid Fuel Technician, Propane or Natural Gas Technician, Stationary Steam Engineer and Boiler Operator.

- Veterans without military training or experience are able to quickly obtain a Helper's license in electrical and plumbing installation which enables the veteran to obtain employment with an electrical contractor. A Helper's employment hours will be credited toward licensing requirements.
- Many veterans have trained on military ships and vessels—this training can be credited toward qualifying for examination for a stationary steam operator license or boiler operator license.

Scheduled Events to Assist Military Veterans and Families:

In advance of Veterans Day this year, the Office issued a news release to highlight the agency's ongoing initiative to assist veterans in applying their military training and experience toward civilian occupational licensing requirements. The press release announced a November 10th licensing event to be held at the Department's headquarters in Gardiner, Maine. We received a

few calls about the event; however, only two individuals attended the four hour opportunity. One individual was interested in pursuing a plumbing license and the second individual came in to discuss information that may lead to license applications. We have found that these events are more successful in attracting military veterans if they are coupled with a regional job fair. The venues tend to be larger, there is more advance advertising and therefore, the events are well attended.

The November 10th licensing opportunity is only the most recent event the Office has conducted during the past three years. Our partners in these prior events are the Department of Labor Career Center staff, members of the Maine Military and Community Network, the Maine National Guard and the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR). These events have been held in Springvale, Portland, Westbrook, Bangor, Waterville, Augusta and Auburn.

Day to Day Contact with Veterans on Military Experience and Training:

Although periodic employment and licensing events are helpful in attracting veterans to our services, we have found that it is the continuous flow of incoming phone calls and emails to our dedicated staff that produces the most successful interactions with veterans. On average, we receive two to three inquiries each week and roughly one-third of these contacts result in a state license (helper, apprentice, journeyman or master in trade occupations) or authorization to take a state exam that ultimately results in the issuance of a state license.

Success Stories:

There are many success stories, although most stories take time to develop from initial contact to license issuance. In addition to assisting many veterans obtain some level of electrician, plumbing or stationary steam engineer license, OPOR staff recently assisted a veteran through the process of obtaining a clinical Pastoral Counselor license. In addition, the spouse of a military veteran has obtained an Interpreter for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing license based on her Texas license; a military veteran with accounting experience and training obtained a CPA license through the process described in this memo. A staff geologist in the Marine Corp reserve who provided geological and hydrogeological expertise in Afghanistan recently obtained his Maine license based on his military work experience.

Recommendation:

There is no question that constant communication between state agencies and organizations that support military veterans is key to our success in assisting veterans. The Office would like to recommend that the Commission consider focusing its attention strengthening its role in the communication of state services to the many military support groups working to help veterans. State agencies like the Office of Professional and Occupational Regulation do not have marketing experience that could enhance communication with veterans. That said, we will continue to work steadily to encourage veterans to contact us and use our services.

The following remarks are provided on your Discussion work Sheet handed out at the 10-04-2015 meeting.

Demographics:

1. There should be one definition of a veteran used by all agencies! All who signed up for any of the armed services and has been in uniform is a veteran! Benefits can be defined by time and type of service. The definition should not be defined by benefits.

Homelessness:

1. Again, we need one definition of homeless. A veteran, without designated abode is homeless. Couch surfing is homelessness.

2. To get an accurate number of homeless veterans, all counters must use the same criteria to define homeless.

BVS:

1. The BVS should have a master list of all resources within the state providing services and support to our Veterans. This list should be available to all VSOs.

2. The BVS VSOs should be located in areas that veterans live in. Due to limited transportation access is a problem for most veterans.

Non BVS-VSOs:

1. Unless non BVS-VSOs are VC certified, the claim process may take a number of iterations of claims to get the veteran the benefits due him/her.

2. Recommend that the BVS provide continuous training for non VA accredited VSOs.

Communications:

1. The VA and VBS needs to use all forms of media to get message out to veterans. The VA is mainly computer based and a lot of veterans do not have

access to the web. the VA needs to use Public Service Announcements. and newspapers to get the word out. Each generation of Veterans uses a different form of communication, so all forms need to be utilized.

Mental Health Care Access:

1. This is the biggest shortage in the State. The VA and the state need to provide mental health care within the state. Our 9/11 Veterans are in need of mental health care in a larger percentage than any other group of veterans before.

Maximizing services and benefits:

1. Do not un-enroll veterans from Maine Care without looking at what the veteran needs and would lose in services.
2. The VA needs to provide better information on the Priority groups for health care to the veterans. Veterans that fall into VA care Group 7 or 8, have a means test. That amounts used for this state are too low.

Transportation:

1. Transportation for our veterans is a needed service that does not exist in this state. The Lewiston VA Outpatient clinic serves Freeport, Bath and Brunswick. There is no public transportation between the mid coast area and Lewiston. How do veterans get to Lewiston? We need an option to get Veterans to the services or the services to the veterans throughout the state.

Employment:

1. The biggest bar to veteran employment is homelessness and mental health issues. If we can fix the above issues then employment will follow. A better job in explaining Vocational rehab to our veterans and assisting them in finding the fit for them.



May 21, 2015

Bruce Knight, President
Patriot Riders of America, Maine Chapter One
P.O. Box 1259
Sanford, Maine 04073

Dear Mr. Knight,

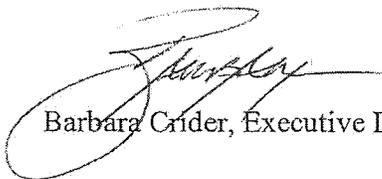
On behalf of York County Community Action Corporation, and our Transportation Program, we wanted to thank you and the members of Maine Chapter One of the Patriot Riders for your most generous support. Your initial donation, along with the commitment to make a monthly contribution for one year toward the newly established Veterans' Transportation Fund, has resulted in immediate benefit to York County veterans.

YCCAC's Veterans' Transportation Fund was created because of the gift from your chapter of the Patriot Riders. We know we're preaching to the choir when we say that being able to provide critical transportation for our veterans continues to be an area where need has exceeded resources for far too long. With the commitment of funds your chapter has made, and with the very capable assistance others in the veterans' advocacy community (including Amy G.), we intend to challenge other organization to help build this fund up as well.

Finally, we were pleased to have been able to provide additional information to Amy G. on her recent visit to YCCAC regarding other resources available through our agency, including our Foreclosure Prevention Counseling. <https://www.yccac.org/index.php/programs/housing-services>. Please feel free to contact us with any questions on how our two organizations can collaborate on these and other fronts.

Thank you for making this most needed transportation service a reality here in York County. We look forward to working with the Maine Chapter One of the Patriot Riders in the coming months and years.

Sincerely,



Barbara Crider, Executive Director



Connie Garber, Transportation Director



November 30, 2015

Senator Ronald Collins and Representative Jared Golden, Chairs
Commission to Strengthen and Align Services Provided to Maine Veterans
Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee
Augusta, Maine 04333

Dear Senator Collins and Representative Golden,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information to the Commission regarding transportation services for Maine veterans. YCCAC, along with all the transportation providers in the state, represented by the Maine Transit Association, have identified this segment of our state's population as a priority for service, along with seniors, including many veterans in that category as well.

As I am sure you are aware, Maine has a very high concentration of veterans, with York County having the second highest number of veterans (19,167) according to the U.S. Census, American Community Survey, after Cumberland (22,138) and ahead of Penobscot (14,626), Kennebec (11,991), Androscoggin (10,223) and Aroostook (7,159).

Despite the service curtailments necessitated by the cessation of all MaineCare trips by YCCAC in February 2014, YCCAC's Transportation Program has sought strategic partnerships with local organizations to address the critical transport needs of veterans in our region. We are most fortunate to have established a collaborative effort with the Patriot Riders of America, Maine Chapter One (refer to attached letter), which has funded over 1100 miles of transport in 2015 for York County veterans. These are trips to the Saco VA Clinic (CBOC) and to other regional health care providers, trips which could not be provided by other VA van services.

The challenge continues to be the growing need to access medical services, particularly for veterans living outside of Maine's few large urban areas, along with the lack of adequate funding with which to accomplish this. Local efforts are laudable, but they are limited, unable to meet all the local needs, with veterans in other parts of the state unable to benefit. There is a real need for a statewide approach, so that veterans are afforded the same access to medical care, regardless of where they call home.

I would be happy to provide any additional information to the Commission that would be helpful to your efforts. Please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Connie Garber
Transportation Director

Attachment