

Little Hoover Commission  
Testimony of J.P. Tremblay,  
Deputy Secretary for Legislation and Communications  
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Good morning and thank you for this opportunity to participate in this important hearing. Every day we see news stories about veterans coming home from war in Iraq and Afghanistan and the challenges that they face, including a very tight employment market, a sluggish economy and over-crowded schools, Post Traumatic Stress and Traumatic Brain Injury and communities that want to help but in many cases don't understand the issues that they are facing.

These men and women want to fit back into society and get back to their "normal" lives before they volunteered and went off to war. For most of them their experiences have changed them; whether or not they served in combat or served in support roles thousands of miles away from the fighting, their time in the military has changed them. They have grown; some have gotten more focused and mature while others are still learning. This has not changed over the years and the conflicts – when someone goes off and joins the military they leave their old life behind and join a structure that can be foreign to many of us. The single most important thing that has changed with the current veterans from those who served before them – they all volunteered to go. They might have had second thoughts after the first week of boot camp, or after the first week sleeping in a berth along with 30 other sailors and Marines, but all volunteered, and for that sacrifice we as a nation and state owe them a great deal.

**What have you learned about the evolution of the veteran population and veterans' needs? As the veteran population changes, how are federal, state and local agencies and organizations equipped to serve them?**

California still has the largest concentration of veterans in the nation, with nearly 2 million of them living in this state. Many are transplants from other states, having been stationed here at one of the many military bases located on the West Coast and deciding to stay. Others are immigrants who opted to join the service to earn their path to citizenship. Many are native Californians who decided to volunteer for any number of reasons.

The veterans have been changing in recent generations. In prior conflicts many were draftees and served one to two years. Some never served in combat zones or came under hostile fire...many did. Many were deployed once and returned home, but left some of their friends behind. Today's veterans are all volunteers. Many are reservists and members of the National Guard with a full life outside the military. Many of the reservists and active duty have served four to six years in the service or longer and many have had multiple deployments throughout the world, in both combat zones and non-combat areas. When they return home they tend to be older than their predecessors of earlier wars. Many reservists and National Guard members

are being called to active duty in these conflicts. Many of the veterans who joined right out of high school are in their mid-20s when they come home. Some have young families and others are finding themselves in situations where their friends from school have moved on and started building careers and families. (See the attached Veteran Population charts.)

There are a higher number of women in the military and specifically in units that have come into direct combat situations. Deputy Secretary Lindsey Sin will address the issues that have come out of that new reality shortly.

The current veteran population in California is predominantly male and white, but that trend is changing as many immigrants and minorities are turning to the military for opportunities to earn citizenship and education benefits. Of the nearly 2 million veterans in California nearly 60 percent (57.8 percent) are of the “Boomer” generation or older (approximately 1,182,000 are 55 years old or older, while about 684,000 are under age 55).

Federal Services: Under the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA), the Veterans Health Administration has expanded its services to veterans by offering five years of medical coverage for those veterans who served in war zones. The military and the VA have been making a concerted effort to de-stigmatize issues like Post Traumatic Stress and mental health issues. For women veterans, they have been trying to build more female specific programs that Deputy Secretary Sin will elaborate upon. In 2008 the Congress passed the Post 9-11 GI Bill which was the most comprehensive education benefit package reform since the original GI Bill following World War II.

State Services: we have been working closely with our partners in the County Veteran Services Office to ensure veterans have advocates for them when they navigate the claims process of the USDVA. Local agencies, like the state, have been dramatically impacted by tight budgets, and reaching out to the nearly 2 million veterans in this state has been the greatest challenge. Veterans don't congregate in one area of the state or social strata. They cross all areas of this state and they come from all walks of life and community. The best tool that we have available is the desire by the state and local governments as well as those community-based non-governmental agencies to help all veterans. Unlike with Vietnam veterans, we as a society have learned to separate the political policies of war from the warriors, and as such, most people today truly appreciate what the men and women who serve in the military have done and are doing for all of us. That, in and of itself, is a significant change.

**What reforms has CDVA made in recent years to increase and improve outreach, improve data collection and data sharing among agencies, and connect veterans with benefits?**

First I think it needs to be clarified that one of the key roles of the CalVet Department is to educate and advocate for veterans and connect them with services and benefits that are available to them. Too many times, we find that veterans don't capitalize on the services and benefits they have available to them. California currently has one of the lowest participation

rates for compensation and pension benefits in the nation. Some of that can be attributed to the veterans choosing not to utilize those benefits or not being aware of the benefits for which they may qualify.

We have also found that many times veterans are served by other state and local agencies but the state has no way of isolating those that are served along with the rest of the general public. This shouldn't be a surprise because rightly so, public health, social services, local schools, local hospitals, etc., don't ask if someone is a veteran because it doesn't really matter, they still provide the service to that veteran because they are a resident of California.

Some departments do identify veterans because they provide specific additional services for veterans, such as the Employment Development Department, and higher education. Each of these state agencies has staff that work specifically with veterans because there are special programs like the GI Bill and Employment benefits specifically tailored to help veterans. However, if a veteran doesn't identify himself or herself as a veteran, he or she still can get services available to the general public and thus are not identified.

In those departments and agencies that do provide services to veterans we have been working with them to find ways of coordinating services and benefits and to share information. In EDD for example, they have been working on a new computer-based system that will allow their employees to connect veterans to services outside of employment benefits. There are challenges that we are trying to resolve including finding legal ways to share information about veterans that file for unemployment benefits without violating their privacy under the federal privacy laws.

While we are still trying to work out ways to share confidential information between departments that doesn't mean we haven't been reaching out to veterans.

The department continues to send out "Welcome Home" letters and packages to veterans that we know return to California. We receive the names of the men and women returning to the state in a hard format spread sheet from the Department of Defense. The list includes the names of those veterans who voluntarily ask for their contact information to be sent to this department. Typically we have been receiving about 25,000-30,000 names a year through that system. Unfortunately, many times that contact information is old and out of date, but at least it is a start.

The Welcome Home package includes a resource book, list of services provided by the USDVA and the state, and the name and contact information for their local County Veteran Service Offices. Again this does require the veteran to take the next step and connect with our department.

The department has implemented a data collection system known as the California Action Plan for Reintegration or the Reintegration Form. This system uses a form that can be filled out on line or in hard copy and collects the veteran's name, contact information, branch of service, and

areas of information. To date we have collected more than 60,000 names in that data base. Whenever our staff goes out to meetings with veterans or resource fairs or job fairs, they will take a supply of these forms and get veterans to fill them out.

We have also been working with the California Department of Motor Vehicles to develop a process for identifying veterans in California as that is probably one of our greatest challenges. Under an agreement we have with the DMV, they have included on driver's license applications and renewal forms, and state ID applications and renewal forms a question of whether or not a person served in the U.S. Military. If the person self identifies and marks that he or she is a veteran their mailing address is sent to the CalVet Department. We then take that information and mail out the "Welcome Home" package and information about how they can register with the CalVet Department to receive information about benefits and services. This is still in the hard copy form right now, but once the DMV has migrated to their new computer systems this process will be automated.

About three years ago, the department implemented an outreach program known as the Local Interagency Network Coordinators or LINC's for short. This program redirected eight positions within the department and deployed those positions throughout the state in various regions, including San Diego, Los Angeles, the Inland Empire, the Bay Area, the Monterey Central Coast area, the Central Valley, Sacramento/Foothill area, and the North State. These individuals are responsible for connecting with veteran services agencies, Veteran Service Organizations local posts, non-profit organizations, local government agencies, local state agency representatives and federal agency representatives and building local-based collaboratives and coalitions. The intent is to break down the silos of services and connect the veterans with the services that they need to succeed and reintegrate back into civilian life.

In addition to the LINC's the department has developed a mobile application that can be used on both Apple's i-Phones and Android devices. This application allows a veteran, their family, a service provider or anyone in the general public to access a data base that can help them find services locally that the veterans might need. Services such as housing, medical care, employment services and education services are all available on this mobile application, which uses the location of the person's telephone to provide them with the closest resources.

In 2009 the department published for the first time a comprehensive Resource Directory that includes information about local, state, and federal benefits for veterans. The first edition was 114 pages long and had a publication run of about 25,000 copies; since that time the publication has grown to 240 pages and a publication run of 400,000. It is the most popular publication that we produce. It can also be found on line at our department's website – [www.calvet.ca.gov](http://www.calvet.ca.gov). These publications are provided to legislators' offices so they can distribute them to their constituents when needed and they are also distributed to Veteran Service Organizations, and non-profits that request copies of the book. We are already in the pre-production process for the next edition that will come out in 2014.

Like most other agencies in this state the CalVet department has also been utilizing social media to reach out to veterans. We aggressively jumped into the social media field about a year ago with a presence on Facebook and Twitter. It is still a new area for this department but we already have more than 3,000 followers on our site and are hoping to continue to grow that number.

There are many other initiatives that the department has implemented in recent years including reaching out to California-based corporations providing their Human Resource offices with information that they can share with their employees that happen to be veterans. We have also provided on-going articles to association newsletters about changes in veteran benefits and services, or new USDVA benefits for presumptive diseases.

All of these efforts are being done within existing departmental budgets.

**What reforms still are needed at the state level for improvement in the above areas? How could the state better assist local agencies in serving veterans?**

One of the biggest reforms that we still need to develop is some kind of clearing house for data and contact information on the veterans living in California. If we could somehow find a feasible way to track when a veteran gets employment services, goes to schools, completes a training program, has a run in with the law, etc., this would give us the ability to better track and plan for the provision of services the veterans and their families might need. The department has been working on the development of a database we are calling CalVet Connect, which will provide that single touch point for information and data.

Through the Interagency Council on Veterans the Department has begun working with the USC School of Social Work and its school of business to develop an asset map that will overlay census information, demographic information about veterans, service information available throughout the area, needs assessments and several other matrices with the object of providing this department and state with a system whereby we can target resources to communities where they are most needed and as a result waste fewer resources in communities that may not need assistance.

We are also working with the California Research Bureau to compile a database of information and studies that have been conducted over the years that will help us to provide the policy makers with the information they need to better address the needs of veterans and their families. Deputy Secretary Sin has also been working with the CRB and the Commission on the Status of Women to conduct needs assessment surveys of women veterans. The latest survey results were released last fall. (See attached summary.) We also have begun efforts in the private sector to work with the Rand Corporation to help in the development of these research efforts. We are working with the Rand Corporation to reduce the gap between state and federal benefits in order to learn how to adjudicate claims faster and foster more collaborative relationships between the two levels of government. And we are working to identify more

effective ways to deliver mental health services to veterans in an effort to prevent the growing rate of veteran suicides.

**Please discuss the work of the Interagency Council on Veterans and how it is achieving greater coordination and changing the ways veterans are served.**

The Governor issued an executive order in August of 2011 creating the Interagency Council on Veterans for the purpose of breaking through the silos of government and creating a network of service providers that would better serve the veterans of California. Since that time the council has brought together literally hundreds of government officials—local, state, and federal – as well as non-government representatives and organizations and Veteran Service Organizations. The attached document outlines the structure and make of the ICV and its mission.

One of the key elemental successes of the ICV is that agencies that have been working tangentially on the same issue were for the first time brought together and seated at a table to talk about what they are doing for veterans. Lines of communication which did not exist before now are in place and working to share best practices and identify potential partnerships and projects that will, in the long run, help veterans.

The ICV is divided into four major working groups and each of those is divided into sub-working groups as needed. Those groups are under the general designations of Housing, Employment, Health and Education.

Each of these workgroups have led to some creative efforts that in some cases have resulted in partnerships that never would have been formed. For example, in the housing workgroup, Habitat for Humanity has partnered with this agency to fund the production of more than 100 low-income homes for veterans and their families. These homes are being built with private resources, sweat equity and our funds will help veterans buy into these beautiful homes.

In the education working group, we have seen an increase in the number of veteran resource centers appearing on community colleges and state universities throughout the state. Many of the campuses that didn't have them before learned through the ICV that the resource centers are very valuable services.

In the employment workgroup, EDD is working with CalVet in efforts to better provide services to veterans going through the employment offices and those men and women who are transitioning out of the services and taking transitional training known as TAP. This is still in development as the Federal Government has recently changed its model for the Transitional Assistance Program, but the communications are continuing.

In addition the working group is looking at how the state can better help veterans who are certified and licensed in specific skills translate those skills into careers here in California.

**How do changes in veterans' needs affect how the state delivers housing and housing finance services? Do returning veterans need different kinds of housing and financing services?**

The housing needs of veterans today are not that significantly different than the housing needs of earlier generations of veterans. A veteran comes home from military service, he or she wants to come home to family and friends and a place they can call their own.

Unfortunately for more than 21,000 veterans in California, they have no home. Some are on the street because they are dealing with demons from their combat service. Others are dealing with substance abuse and still others are finding themselves on the street because they couldn't find a job. There are many programs and non-profit organizations that help homeless veterans transition from the street and get clean and sober; where there is a gap tends to be in the long-term transitional housing segment and that is where CalVet might be able to help.

The CalVet Home Loan program was established in 1921 and, since that time, nearly half a million veterans and their families have utilized that program to buy their homes. The CalVet Home Loan program is one of the most financially sound public housing agencies in the country, with a bond rating for its general obligation bonds of AA from the three major rating agencies. Its principal purpose from the time it was formed to today is to fund the purchase of homes for veterans and their families.

However, since it started back when California was predominantly an agricultural state, the program offered only two options to veterans – they could buy a farm or a single-family home. As you noted in your question, the needs for housing have changed over the years, as the products that CalVet offers have also changed. Thanks to recent legislative changes, the definition of a home has been expanded to include condominiums, manufactured homes, mobile homes, four-plexes and cooperative homes. All of these changes were created to provide veterans and their families with options for home ownership.

In fact, we have recently formed a partnership with Habitat for Humanity to provide more than 100 affordable homes to low-income veteran families that live in the Greater Los Angeles Area. Through this partnership, a low-income veteran can earn equity in the home through "sweat equity" and the department will provide the largest portion of funding for the veteran to buy that home. These three-bedroom homes are beautiful and will include supportive services in community centers located at each of the developments.

The one thing that didn't change is the restriction of the home loan program, under federal tax laws and the provisions of the bonds approved by voters, the funds can only provide owner-occupied home loans. At this point, CalVet cannot provide funding or loans for development of rental property; however, that is an area where we can effect a change.

The department has been working with its bond counsel and experts in financing to see how we can expand into rental property projects. We have also been working with the Department of Housing and Community Development to explore opportunities for partnership with that

department to fund multi-family rental projects. We currently have a Memorandum of Understanding between our two agencies and we are in discussions with them on some potential projects that would meet that need for developing long-term transitional housing projects. There have also been several private developers that have shown interest in helping develop those kinds of projects.

We have been approached by several communities that are interested in partnering with our department to develop veteran village types of housing projects for veterans. However, after surviving the recent real estate bust we have been very cautious in our approach to starting something new with these Housing programs. The CalVet program has survived through the Great Depression and now the Great Recession without having to ask the state for a bail out so you can understand why we have been cautious in our approach to new initiatives.

We are not there yet, but we are moving toward one day providing low-income rental housing options for veterans and their families, while also providing the home-ownership option to veterans that they have come to expect from us.

One final area I would like to discuss under the Home Loan program is rather exciting when you consider the program was started with homes and farms. There have been a couple of unique programs that have started recently that bring veterans into agriculture as a means of therapeutic treatment. Research has found that working on the land and growing crops or working around farms has helped some veterans deal with the trials of PTSD. We have begun discussion with one of these groups about the idea of helping veterans get loans for "micro farms," full farms or even cooperative farms. These are just early discussions, but we are confident that we can help in this area as well.

As you can see, we have been doing a lot but there is still much to be done. It can't be done with just one level of government or just volunteers; it has to include all levels of government and all facets of the community to really make sure veterans receive the welcome home they have earned.