

4. 21st Century Veterans Support.

SECTION 1. IC 10-17. Synopsis: Fund current state requirement that every county shall have an accredited county veteran service officer by providing annual grant equal to 50% of the minimum federal exempt employee salary. Provides IDVA with “fenced” fund to provide grants to counties based upon their veteran population using a formula of one CVSO per ever 7,500 veterans in the county rounded to the nearest half minus one. These individuals would be responsible to support veterans in jails, prisons, and veterans’ treatment courts in addition to processing claims in counties in their area of operation in support of veterans.

Rationale: *IDVA has remained the same since created in 1943! Compared to top veterans’ agencies in other states, Indiana is grossly under serving our military and veterans. If you look at Oklahoma for example they have fewer veterans, and are staffed over 4 times that of Indiana. Ohio has 25 full time employees plus 4 approving authority staff. Ohio funds all 88 counties based upon property tax revenue. See Ohio Title 59 and Ohio Title 55 for tax formula. Ohio County Veterans’ Service Officers are required to transport veterans to medical facilities if needed and assist in claims and benefits, Indiana CVSO do not have this requirement.*

Indiana current law required every county to have an accredited county veterans’ service officer (CVSO). To meet that requirement of accreditation a service officer must work a minimum of 1000 hours using Department of Veterans Affairs accepted computer tools and forms. Additionally, they must be able to pass an accreditation renewal test annually. The Department of Veterans Affairs continues to upgrade and change the knowledge veterans service officers know. Indian’s Department of Veterans Affairs has chosen to use ‘VETRASPEC” software and service to achieve this 1000 requirement. This software cost approximately \$500 per user per year and includes service connection to the federal VA system. This includes access to VA medical records. As the state requires this accreditation, the state should fund the service hours, annual training, training expenses, and “Vetraspec” software. Therefore, they need an appropriation from the general fund. Taking funds from the Military Trust Fund or the Military Family Relief Fund is NOT feasible as these funds are extensively used to provide military personnel with emergency funds when they are in crises.

Creating a model to have additional county veteran service officers based upon the veteran population insures adequate support for the veteran where they live! These additional CVSOs will have the expertise to help county veterans’ treatment courts in the understanding and issues that will come up unique to veterans and their families. These grants would move our state support closer to the counties, and facilitates marketing to veterans in their geographic area of responsibility for programs such as veterans administration benefits, state veteran benefits, and support to veterans’ treatment courts. Coupled with the driver’s license initiative identified elsewhere in this document, Indiana would be able to identify veterans and where they live so that they can be “marketed to” and educated/ assisted with receiving the benefits they earned through their service.

Sadly, many veterans are imprisoned and Indiana should have a specialist who can work with these veterans and the corrections department to help veterans as they proceed toward post-imprisonment life. Most veterans don’t know what help is available and end up committing crimes again unless mentors, veterans service organizations, and government agencies get involved. They get released back into society with no home, no money, no job, no skill, and no help. This leads to more crime, or worse suicide.

Counties	Vet count	Calculated	Adds
Allen	23,236,	3.10	2additional
Clark	9,089,	1.21	0 additional
Delaware	8,727,	1.16	0 additional
Elkhart	10,956	1.46	.5 additional
Hamilton	17,136	2.28	1 additional
Hendricks	13,355	1.78	1 additional
Johnson	11,834	1.58	.5 additional
La Porte	10,020	1.34	.5 additional
Lake	31,423	4.19	3 additional
Madison	10,818	1.44	.5 additional
Marion	61,688	8.225	7 additional
Porter	13,331	1.77	1 additional
St Joseph	17,608	2.35	1.5 additional
Tippecanoe	10,274	1.37	.5 additional
Vanderburgh	12,873	1.72	1 additional
Vigo	8,167	1.09	<u>0 additional</u>

23 different positions and 20 FTE Total

20 additional FTEs @ \$47,476= \$949,520

SECTION 2. IC 10-17. Synopsis: Fund County Veteran Service Officers. Provides adequate staffing hours (1000 per year) in every county. Provides funding from IDVA operating budget or establish a separate appropriation from the general fund for all Veteran Service Officers.

Rationale: *Today 20 counties do not comply with Indiana code requiring them to have at least one county veteran serve officer trained and accredited by the federal Department of Veterans Affairs. These CVSOs develop and assist veterans who are filing a disability compensation claim. In 2011, \$180,000 was spent to train and equip all CVSOs with computers and software to accomplish this. The return on this investment as of September 30, 2014 is \$660 MILLION this would not have happened without CVSO assistance which was only possible because of their accreditation training. This is a 3000 to 1 ROI! Indiana ranks 47th in the nation and is over 38,000 veterans short of meeting the federal goal of 36% of all veterans receiving benefits. We believe that the lack of accredited CVSOs contributes to the exodus of veterans from Indiana. It also costs the state MILLIONS of dollars in state funds that could be covered using federal veterans benefits that these veterans have earned, but did not receive. Included in these costs are disability compensation, education, housing, medical care, long term care, and others earned VA benefits. Some of these veterans also receive Mental Health and substance abuse assistance, SNAP, TANF, and low income financial assistance for the state. These are drains on the state! A 2015 study done by the Public Consulting Group for the State of Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs indicated several recommendations that Indiana does not take advantage of in this area.*

Calculation: 92 CVSOs * (.5*\$47,476) = \$2,183,896.00 annually.

SECTION 3. IC10-17-12. Synopsis: **Funding Service Officer training, renewal, training expenses, and software/service.** Directs annual appropriation from General Fund in amount per biannual budget.

Rationale: *See above rationale.*

Calculation: 92 CVSOs + 23 CVSOs* \$500 for software+\$170 per hotel, food, and travel=\$77,050

SECTION 4. IC10-17-1-9. Synopsis: County service officers, city service officers, and assistants' requirements. Requires the designation and duties of county service officers to serve for 5 years. Poor performance should be considered to remove service officer sooner.

Rationale: *County service officers, city service officers, and assistants today can be appointed for 4 years. We propose removing the appointment of up to 5 years and requiring the designation and duties of county service officers. Some counties have county service officers in name only, and their duties vary dramatically with other counties. In some instances counties have not gotten their service officers trained or accredited, there needs to be consequences of not doing so.*

SECTION 5. IC 10-17-1-6 Synopsis: Expands duties of the IDVA director to include notification to county/city leadership, governor, of non-compliance to IC 10-17-1-9 **County service officer, city service officer, and assistants within 60 days of date the vacancy occurs.**

Rationale: *Several County / City service officers do not become accredited, retain their accreditation, or retire and must be replaced. Initial training and getting replacements up to speed is crucial to the success and support of veterans who need assistance.*

SECTION 6. IC 6-3.6-9-12, Requires a portion of local income taxes to be withheld from cities and counties that fail to enforce accreditation and reaccreditation requirements for city and county service officers.

(text from HB1089 of 2016) Sec. 12. (a) Except as provided in subsection (b), one-twelfth (1/12) of each adopting county's certified distribution for a calendar year shall be distributed from its trust account established under this chapter to the appropriate county treasurer on the first regular business day of each month of that calendar year. (b) If the Indiana veterans' affairs commission has certified to the auditor of state and the budget agency that a county or city is not in compliance with the requirements of IC 10-17-1, one-fourth (1/4) of the part of the certified distribution that would be distributed to the county civil taxing unit shall be withheld by the auditor of state until the city or county has complied with IC 10-17-1. 15 (c) If a part of a distribution is withheld under subsection (b) and the city or county subsequently complies with IC 10-17-1, the auditor of state shall distribute to the county civil taxing unit the amount of the distribution that was previously withheld, without interest for the period during which the distribution was withheld. (d) A withholding made under subsection (b) shall not affect a distribution to any unit other than the county civil taxing unit.

Rationale: *See above rationale.*

GRAND TOTAL IS: \$3,208,456.00