

File ID# 23-4808
September 21, 2023
Prepared Statement of Wayne Kern
VFW Post 1337 (Mt. Prospect), Delegate to VACCC

I previously testified before the Veterans Committee on May 24, 2023 (See File ID# 23-2081). At that time, I was simply a delegate representing my VFW Post. After becoming a member of the Services Provided Committee (SPC), I volunteered to compare the VACCC with the ten next largest VACs, based on the number of veterans each served. Over a period of six months, research using public sources was the basis for my SFC report dated 3/14/2023 and a related spreadsheet. That research showed the VACCC's budget, per veteran served, was no more than 6% to 16% of the other VAC budgets. The VACCC also stood out for its lack of even a single Veterans Service Officer on its staff. I emailed copies of both documents to the Board before presenting them in person during my testimony. For some reason, however, these documents have still never been published. (See the screen print made today.)

Recently, I was elected to the VACCC Board. In that capacity, I am in favor of the Veterans Committee request for a meeting with the VACCC and the CCVA. It deserves updates from the VACCC. While there has been progress in providing additional funding for the VACCC, I believe review of those reports submitted May 24th will demonstrate that still more is needed.

If the Cook County Board is unable to electronically post my statement, the screen print I captured today and the two reports first supplied on May 24th, I request that the Cook County Board forward all items directly to every Veterans Committee member. They contain data which will assist members in deciding on the proper funding for the VACCC.

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Six-Month Progress Report on, and Evaluation of, the SPC Project

The best way to start this analysis of the SPC's plan to research and review services provided by other county VACs, is to refer to the following founding documents:

1. Chairperson (CP) Knudtson's minutes for the September 15th SPC meeting, which listed three agreed-upon goals on page 3
2. Superintendent (Supt) Soto's prototype Excel spreadsheet, provided October 25th, with rows for specific types of information she had identified the day before

These and other relevant documents may be found in the OneDrive album.

The SPC's first goal was to compare VACCC with its collar counties (Lake, DuPage and Will) plus other counties based on the size of their budgets and other attributes like the nature of their communities, i.e. urban v. rural. Early research showed it would not be so easy to get consistent, accurate numbers even for something as simple as the veteran population per county. (See the "By County" research folder containing online claims by the VACs themselves, the Census Bureau, etc.) CP Knudtson solved the problem by supplying a VA source, which was chosen as the standard. Coincidentally, there was a shift to simplify this goal by just comparing VACCC with the ten next counties having the greatest number of veteran residents.

The second goal specified the kinds of data to be collected. From the outset, some of these had to be changed because many VAC reports were not broken down to the needed level of detail. As with the first goal, this issue alerted us to the problem of recording Qualitative and Quantitative information on the same form. (This will be addressed later when the spreadsheet is reviewed.) For example, even if we could compute a VAC's per capita average distribution, there was not enough detail in its reports to allow a second calculation of the dollar amount of assistance per type of service. We only began to report our calculations of budget dollars per veteran in a county on our spreadsheet around January 21. Where possible, we later added a calculation of the average dollars of Direct Financial Aid per veteran for each county.

The SPC's third goal identified the sources to be used in collecting data. The first three were relatively easy to find; however, that did not mean they provided the figures we sought. Even though VACs are required to file annual reports with the Governor's Office, no published copies could be found in most cases. Folders for each VAC, containing scans of relevant information from those sources, have also been uploaded to OneDrive. Each SFC member has been sent a link for access. No interviews of VAC Superintendents were conducted, so that remains an option to discuss.

Even though many format changes have been made, Supt Soto's Excel prototype spreadsheet has remained a steady framework for collecting all the information desired so far by her and other SFC members. If, however, the SPC wants to add more Qualitative information (like a detailed description of the transportation services provided in each county under the SERVICES AND PROGRAMS heading) or more Quantitative data (like the previously-mentioned dollar amount of financial assistance per service under the TOTAL DIRECT EXPENDITURES heading), we need help from somebody like Peter Bencak, who helped create VACCC's "January 2023 Report afm.pdf" which Supt Soto recently sent out.

Despite the lack of uniform reporting standards for VACs and the lack of more detailed disclosures by them concerning amounts they have spent on specific programs, enough progress has been made to draw some conclusions:

1. VACCC reports contain far more details than those of the other VACs found on public sources.
2. VACCC stands out for its lack of VSOs. Research easily documented that VSOs were on the staff of all but two of the other VACs. Those VACs proudly report the amount of benefits obtained on behalf of veterans they had served. Madison and Kane counties claimed, respectively, \$4.65 million and \$5.8 million for 2022 while Will announced a VSO Award Log of \$122 million from 2015 to June 2022.
3. VACCC is underfunded.
 - a. While the VACCC's annual budget only averaged about \$2.73 per veteran, the budgets for the other ten VACs averaged from \$16 to \$43 per veteran. The majority, six out of ten, ranged from \$35 to \$43 per veteran.
 - b. While the VACCC's average amount of Direct Financial Aid was just \$1.56 per veteran, the averages for six of the others were \$1.32, \$3.56, \$3.75, \$4.41, \$8.50 and \$19.00 while there was insufficient data to calculate an amount for the other four VACs.

This report has suggested some additional steps the SPC may wish to take:

1. No new research has been conducted since February 1st, but before starting again, it should ask SPC membership for input, corrections and thoughts about what needs to be done next.
2. It could request interviews of other VAC Superintendents.
3. It could seek assistance from IACVAC to help develop a standard report and to encourage VACs to use it.
4. It could ask the Governor's Office to make annual VSO reports easily accessible.

Wayne K. Kern
VFW Post 1337
Representative
March 14, 2023

**VACCC SERVICES COMPARED WITH THOSE PROVIDED BY
VACs IN OTHER COUNTIES, SORTED BY SIZE OF VETERAN POPULATION**

COOK COUNTY VAC (VACCC)
POINT OF CONTACT
Superintendent Elizabeth D. Soto
312-433-6012

VACCC CRITERIA

Honorable or General (UHC) Discharge w/ min 6 months of Active Duty Service (exceptions for National Guard, Medical Paternity and/or LGBTQIA2S+) or 1 full contract served)
Total Household income below 250% of the current Federal Poverty Guideline

VACCC BUDGET
FY22: \$471,270

VACCC TOTAL DIRECT EXPENDITURES
FY22: \$269,254.67

VACCC PERSONNEL COUNT
3 Full-Time Staff

1-Superintendent, 1-Executive Assistant / Office Manager/ Assistance Coordinator and
1-Finance Officer / Records Manager / Assistance Coordinator

No VSOs -can't cite (like Kane Co.) benefits obtained for vets

VACCC DISBURSEMENT TIMEFRAMES

Rent/ Mortgage: 1x12months
Utility Bill(s): 1x12 months
Food Gift Card: 1x6 months
Transportation: Weekly
Uniform: 1x24months
Burial: 1x

FY22 VACCC SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

Up to \$1,400.00: Rent or Mortgage
Up to \$550.00: Utility Bills (Water, Light, Gas)
Food Assistance (Gift Cards) 1-\$100 Gift Card for Veteran and 1-\$100 Gift Card for each qualifying dependant
Transportation: Weekly CTA and/or Pace Cards
Uniform Employment Assistance: \$100.00 Walmart Gift Card
Up to \$1,500.00 Burial Assistance
Job Placement & Resume Writing Partnership: Of Color, Inc.
V.A. Claims via Partnership: ILDVA or VFW Regional Office
Veteran Subsidized Housing Assistance via Partnership: Innervoice
Car Repair Assistance via Partnership: Innervoice
Free Veteran and family Counseling Via Partnership: Chicago Vet Center
Holiday Toy Give-Away for children of Cook County Veterans

COOK COUNTY VETERANS SERVED
172,574

AVERAGE BUDGET \$'s PER VETERAN: **\$2.73**
AVERAGE DIRECT AID PER VETERAN: **\$1.56**

LAKE COUNTY VAC (VACLC)
POINT OF CONTACT
Superintendent Andrew Tangen
847-377-3344

VACLC CRITERIA

Honorable or GUH Discharge after 24 months of Active Service
Homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, as by displacement caused by a natural disaster
Bank account required

VACLC BUDGET
FY23:\$1.6M (\$5.1M -\$3.5M Cap. Improve)?

VACLC TOTAL DIRECT EXPENDITURES
in 2022 Budget, FY21 & FY22 targets were \$90K & \$180K modified FY22:\$134,140
rec in FY23 budget: \$207,495

VACLC PERSONNEL COUNT
7 Total *

Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Chief of Staff plus 3 VSO's and 1 Administrative Assistant per current homepage *5-year historical in 2022 was 8 full time + 1 part time

VACLC DISBURSEMENT TIMEFRAMES

Direct Financial Aid limited to once every 12 months

VACLC SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

Past Due Rent or Mortgage
Utility Bills
Property Taxes
Emergency Shelter or Hotel Stay
Misc. Expenses: Home Repairs, Unique Situations
PACE Ride Share Proram
Car Repair

Medical Bills
V.A. Claims Filing

LAKE COUNTY VETERANS SERVED
45,362

AVERAGE BUDGET \$'s PER VETERAN: **\$35.27 ?**
AVERAGE DIRECT AID PER VETERAN: **\$2.96 - \$4.57**
1.9 times VACCC in 2022

DuPAGE COUNTY (VACDC)
POINT OF CONTACT
Superintendent Steve Fixler
630-407-5655

VACDC CRITERIA

Emergency financial assistance to indigent veterans, with an Honorable or GUH Discharge, their spouses and dependents
Veteran must be a DuPage County Resident
Federal Poverty Level – Under 300%: (Single Veteran - \$3397 or Married - \$4577)

VACDC BUDGET
FY23: \$529,477

VACDC TOTAL DIRECT EXPENDITURES
VA Affairs August YTD actual in FY22: \$142K
VA Affairs recommended FY23:\$200K

VACDC PERSONNEL COUNT
3 Total

Superintendent, Administrative Assistant and Case Manager

VACDC DISBURSEMENT TIMEFRAMES

The temporary emergency financial assistance program is not to be considered an on-going financial supportive program over any considerable period.

VACDC SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

Mortgage or Rent payments
Utility payments
Work or Home related expenses
Food and Family Essentials
Auto Expenses
Emergency medical prescription
VA Medical Transportation needs
Burial expenses
Information and referrals
Location and retrieval of discharge documents
Work with other services for the Veteran Community:
Midwest Shelter for Homeless Veterans
DuPage Homeless Veterans Taskforce
Catholic Charities and MSHV with the VA SSVF Grant

DuPAGE COUNTY VETERANS SERVED
32,177

AVERAGE BUDGET \$'s PER VETERAN: **\$16.46**
*AVERAGE DIRECT AID PER VETERAN: **\$4.41 ***
2.83 times VACCC

**VACCC SERVICES COMPARED WITH THOSE PROVIDED BY
VACs IN OTHER COUNTIES, SORTED BY SIZE OF VETERAN POPULATION**

WILL COUNTY (VACWILLC)
POINT OF CONTACT Assistant Superintendent Jen Solom 815-740-8389 vacwc@willcountyillinois.com
VACWILLC CRITERIA
Financial aid to veterans, who live in Will Co. and who fall below the 150% Federal Poverty Level, is paid directly to vendors. Those cleared to work must sign up for Will Co.'s Employment Assistance Program (EAP) and attend EAP meetings at the end of every month.
VACWILLC BUDGET
FY22:\$1.01M - FY23:\$1.05M
VACWILLC TOTAL DIRECT EXPENDITURES
unable to obtain
VACWILLC PERSONNEL COUNT
8 Total per current homepage*
Assistant Superintendent, Executive Assistant, Administrative Assistant, 3 VSO's, Peer Support Specialist and Driver *FY21 to FY22 counts went from 7 to 9
VACWILLC DISBURSEMENT TIMEFRAMES
VACWILLC SERVICES AND PROGRAMS
Rent or Mortgage Utilities Project 150 is a VAC Hotel for emergency shelter Food Personal Needs Free transportation to and from medical appointments
Guides veterans to employment needs experts like: Goodwill Workforce Connection Will County Workforce Connection Illinois Department of Employment Security Job Club-VA's Compensated Workforce Therapy Program EAP meetings in VAC boardroom at the end of every month Has a "VSO Award Log" (2015- -Present) = \$122M in June '22
WILL COUNTY VETERANS SERVED
28,583
AVERAGE BUDGET \$'s PER VETERAN: \$35.34 / \$36.74 12.9 to 13.5 times VACCC's AVERAGE DIRECT AID PER VETERAN: unknown

SAINT CLAIR COUNTY (VACSCC)
POINT OF CONTACT Superintendent Kurt Daesch 618-277-0040
VACSCC CRITERIA
Honorable Discharge -no Misconduct Income under a Monthly Gross, Based on Family Size
VACSCC BUDGET
Calendar Years 2022:\$375K / 2023:\$630K
VACSCC TOTAL DIRECT EXPENDITURES
Calendar Year 2023:\$228K Direct to indigent vets \$217K, Burial expenses \$11K
VACSCC PERSONNEL COUNT
5 Total
Director, Executive Secretary / Counselor, 2 VSO's and 1 Part-Time
VACSCC DISBURSEMENT TIMEFRAMES
\$300 max on utilities per month Language about Monthly Gross is not Clear One-Time exemption only if Supr. Approves
VACSCC SERVICES AND PROGRAMS
Rent, Food and Hygiene, Based on Family Size Utilities - up to Set Maximum
SAINT CLAIR COUNTY VETERANS SERVED
26,832
AVERAGE BUDGET \$'s PER VETERAN: \$13.98 / \$23.48 AVERAGE DIRECT AID PER VETERAN: \$8.50 5.45 times VACCC

MADISON COUNTY (VACMC)
POINT OF CONTACT Superintendent Bradley Lavite 618-296-4554
VACMC CRITERIA
Must be county resident and must complete a Veterans' Financial Assistance Request Form. Interim and/or Emergency Veterans' Financial Assistance (IVA and/or EVA) are based on income and need. IVA is based on IDES standard; EVA is one time aid to get through a qualified emergency. Amount is now based on 200% of HHS guidelines. Cannot be receiving aid for the same items from another source.
VACMC BUDGET
plan FY22:\$858K - actual levy EOY22:\$707,102
VACMC TOTAL DIRECT EXPENDITURES
plan FY22:\$96K but actual EOY22: \$73,137
VACMC PERSONNEL COUNT
9 Total
Superintendent, 2 Administrative Assistants, 3 VSO's and 3 Temp Employees
VACMC DISBURSEMENT TIMEFRAMES
Financial Assistance is not designed to be support over any considerable period of time. EVA is one-time aid.
VACMC SERVICES AND PROGRAMS
Do NOT include Crisis Response. Basic Need categories: Food (for pets too), Personal Hygiene Rent and Mortgage Assistance Electric, Gas and Propane/Heating Fuel Water, Sewer and Trash Phone and Internet Assistance for Low Income Households Limited Lifetime Property Tax Assistance to Avoid Default Bed with Mattress, Dresser, Kitchen Table, Utensils/Wares, etc. Household Items are limited 1-time assistance Bus tokens get to and from VAC appointments and employment throughout Madison County until 1st pay check
Beyond financial assistance, VAC helps with outreach and by securing benefits for veterans. (\$4.65M obtained in 2022)
MADISON COUNTY VETERANS SERVED
20,512 (2022 Annual Report claims 19,500)
AVERAGE BUDGET \$'s PER VETERAN: \$41.83 / \$34.47 AVERAGE DIRECT AID PER VETERAN: \$3.56 2.28 times VACCC

**VACCC SERVICES COMPARED WITH THOSE PROVIDED BY
VACs IN OTHER COUNTIES, SORTED BY SIZE OF VETERAN POPULATION**

KANE COUNTY (VACKC)
POINT OF CONTACT Superintendent Jacob Zimmerman 630-232-3550 zimmermanjacob@co.kane.il.us
VACKC CRITERIA
Veteran must complete and submit VAC's Application form, with DD 214 and, if applicable, copies of marriage certificate, children's birth certificates or adoption decrees, government issued photo ID's showing a current Kane county residence
VACKC BUDGET FY23:\$464,764
TOTAL DIRECT EXPENDITURES FY22:No Figure Reported 2022 Annual Report:Only 21 vets applied like McHenry County
VACKC PERSONNEL COUNT 6 Total (up to 9 with max number of interns) Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, 2 VSO's and currently 2 Interns (may go up to 5) Since the interns are paid by other VA programs, VAC saves on personnel cost.
VACKC DISBURSEMENT TIMEFRAMES 2022 Annual Report:Only 21 vets applied
VACKC SERVICES AND PROGRAMS
Rent or Mortgage Utilities Food Personal Needs Transportation
*VAC's 2022 Annual Report noted Kane County vets have a significantly higher median income than the average non-veteran citizen.
All 4 staff members now Certified Veterans Advocates (CVAs) In 2022, with their advanced training, they claim a record \$5.8M in added or increased benefits for veterans.
KANE COUNTY VETERANS SERVED 19,353 (It only claims 18,644 online)
AVERAGE BUDGET \$'s PER VETERAN: \$24.02 8.80 times VACCC's AVERAGE DIRECT AID PER VETERAN: Minimal*

WINNEBAGO COUNTY (VACWinnC)
POINT OF CONTACT Superintendent Steve Thomas 815-516-2850
VACWinnC CRITERIA
Veterans, their families, and surviving spouses, residing in Winnebago County, financial Assistance if income qualified Must be seeking employment or disability. Need original or certified copies of DD-214 / DD-215, with GUH discharge and valid photo ID plus Social Security card. 929 veterans served FY21
VACWinnC BUDGET FY22 and plan for FY23:\$652,000
VACWinnC TOTAL DIRECT EXPENDITURES FY22:\$318,000
VACWinnC PERSONNEL COUNT 7 Total Could not get more than a list of names and salaries without job titles.
VACWinnC DISBURSEMENT TIMEFRAMES
VACWinnC SERVICES AND PROGRAMS
Rent or Mortgage (voucher) Utilities (voucher and/or referral) SNAP card, etc. by referral Personal Hygiene (limited use vouchers and/or referrals) Transportation
WINNEBAGO COUNTY VETERANS SERVED 16,885
AVERAGE BUDGET \$'s PER VETERAN: \$38.61 AVERAGE DIRECT AID PER VETERAN: \$18.83 12.07 times VACCC

McHENRY COUNTY (VACMcC)
POINT OF CONTACT Superintendent Michael Iwanicki 815-334-4229 MAlwanic@mchenrycountyil.gov
VACMcC CRITERIA
Emergency Assistance can be provided to applicants who are not eligible for Veterans General Assistance and fall below 250% of the poverty level. Each recipient is required to attend budgeting class at Consumer Credit Counseling. Disaster Assistance applies when party was not the cause of housing loss.
VACMcC BUDGET calendar 2021: \$601,805
VACMcC TOTAL DIRECT EXPENDITURES calendar 2021: \$18,400 like Kane County
VACMcC PERSONNEL COUNT 10 Total Superintendent, Chairman, VSO-II (Deputy), 2 VSO-I's, an Office Clerk / Dispatcher and 4 Transportation Specialists
VACMcC DISBURSEMENT TIMEFRAMES
Emergency Veterans Assistance is available to those in need of one-time assistance for rent, mortgage, or utilities in arrears
VACMcC SERVICES AND PROGRAMS
Assistance is paid directly to vendors for Rent or Mortgage, Utilities, Food, and Gasoline Vets with disability, transportation issues, or work schedule can make off site, after hours, or virtual appointments in 2021 the VACMcC filled 645 transportation appointments for 206 local veterans using 4 vehicles which make stops in Woodstock, McHenry, Crystal Lake and Lovell FHCC Caregiver Relief Veterans Assistance Referrals to Other Social Service Agencies Outreach Education Program in 2021 claims prepared by their VSOs resulted in just under \$3.5M in new claims dollars
McHENRY COUNTY VETERANS SERVED 13,952
AVERAGE BUDGET \$'s PER VETERAN: \$43.13 AVERAGE DIRECT AID PER VETERAN: \$1.32 only 85% of VACCC

**VACCC SERVICES COMPARED WITH THOSE PROVIDED BY
VACs IN OTHER COUNTIES, SORTED BY SIZE OF VETERAN POPULATION**

SANGAMON COUNTY (VACSC)	PEORIA COUNTY (VACPC)	ADDITIONAL COUNTY
POINT OF CONTACT Superintendent Dane Shaffer 217-753-6694 dane.shaffer@sangamonil.gov	POINT OF CONTACT Superintendent Michael Brooks 309-681-2554	POINT OF CONTACT Superintendent
VACSC CRITERIA Service available only to Sangamon County, IL residents who are eligible veterans and their families	VACPC CRITERIA All assistance provided by the VACPC is predicated on an established standard of need as set forth by IDHS. Applicants must produce a DD-214 or Certificate of Service for Honorable (or Under Honorable Conditions) Discharge, be residents of the county unable to provide food, shelter etc. and have applied for Public Aid (AFDC, Food Stamps, and medical)	CRITERIA
VACSC BUDGET FY22 adopted: \$243,151 - FY23 recommended: \$306,903	VACPC BUDGET actual EOY total expend 2019:\$510,355 & 2020:\$473,043*	BUDGET
VACSC TOTAL DIRECT EXPENDITURES could not find only expenditure report found was for EOY 2021 there was no breakdown of total \$230,856	VACPC TOTAL DIRECT EXPENDITURES could not find	TOTAL DIRECT EXPENDITURES
VACSC PERSONNEL COUNT 7 Total Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, 1 Senior VSO and 2 VSO's, 1 Assistant VSO, and 1 Executive Administrative Assistant.	VACPC PERSONNEL COUNT 3 Total As listed on stationery letterhead: Superintendent Brooks, Trisha Collins - VSR, and Brianna Lauer- Assistance Coordinator	PERSONNEL COUNT Total
In March 2023, VAC plans to hire 1 more Assistant VSO VACSC DISBURSEMENT TIMEFRAMES annual one-time emergency assistance	VACPC DISBURSEMENT TIMEFRAMES Emergency and interim financial assistance should not be considered to be an ongoing financial supportive program	DISBURSEMENT TIMEFRAMES
VACSC SERVICES AND PROGRAMS Rent or Mortgage Utilities Food Personal Needs Burial Assistance Offers transportation to Danville VAMC, Peoria CBOC, and St Louis VAMC Assist with filing SHEVD disability verifications online VAC has VSO's accredited by the VA to prepare, present, and prosecute VA Disability and Pension claims	VACPC SERVICES AND PROGRAMS Rent (not security deposits, back rents or home finding fees) Utilities and Fuel (no deposits or past due bills) Food and Personal Items: Depending on family size Personal Needs Transportation to the local Veterans Medical Center	SERVICES AND PROGRAMS
SANGAMON COUNTY VETERANS SERVED 13,399 AVERAGE BUDGET \$'s PER VETERAN: \$18.15 to \$22.90 6.7 to 8.4 times VACCC's AVERAGE DIRECT AID PER VETERAN: unknown	PEORIA COUNTY VETERANS SERVED 10,908 2020 AVERAGE BUDGET \$'s PER VETERAN: \$43.37 15.9 times VACCC's AVERAGE DIRECT AID PER VETERAN: unknown	VETERANS SERVED

2023-9-20 screen print of Veterans Committee 5-24-2022 v2 (File ID# 23-2081) - Document Viewer is still empty

The screenshot shows a web browser window with several tabs open: "Mail - Wayne Kern - Ou...", "cookcountyboard - Yah...", "Watch Live Board Proce...", "Board of Commissioner...", "Veterans Committee 5-...", and "Online Survey Software...". The address bar displays the URL "https://cook-county.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=2&clip_id=4062". Below the address bar, there are several bookmarks, including "Getting Started", "Best German TV Show...", "Deutsche Modalpartik...", and "ZS Anmeldung - ZEIT SP...".

The main content area is split into two sections. On the left, there is a video player with the "Cook County Illinois" logo at the top. The video shows a woman with long dark hair sitting at a table with a microphone, speaking. The video player controls show a progress bar at 01:07 / 27:15, along with play, stop, and volume icons. Below the video, the title "Veterans Committee 5-24-2022 v2" is displayed, along with "Index", "Share", and "Embed" options.

On the right side of the main content area, there is a "Document Viewer" section. It features a document icon and the text "Document Viewer" and "No documents to display".