

Michigan Commanders Group 2023 Legislative Priorities



Overview

The Michigan Commanders Group is the coalition of Michigan's Congressionally Chartered Veterans Service Organizations. Collectively, these organizations represent Michigan's 550,000+ veterans and their families, and have been the state's leader in successfully advocating for this population for nearly 100 years. Since the late 1920s, Michigan's Congressionally Chartered Veteran Service Organizations have been staunch advocates in representing veterans and their family members in filing disability claims with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs – including appeals as far as the U.S. Court of Veterans' Appeals. The Commanders Group has also been highly successful in getting treatment and disability compensation for those who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Last year the recoveries (dollars brought back to Michigan through properly adjudicated disability claims) totaled over \$660 million. The Commanders Group also works with the Governor, the legislature, and the departments & agencies which serve the more than 550,000 veterans in the State. It also coordinates with the counties and the municipalities that operate veterans' offices and/or programs.

In addition to advocating for individual veterans in filing their disability claims, and advocating for veterans and their families in the State Legislature, each member of the Commander's Group uses its resources at the national level to advocate for and assist veterans and their families throughout the nation.

The organizations that make up The Michigan Commanders Group are: The American Legion (TAL), American Veterans (AMVETS), Catholic War Veterans (CWV), Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Jewish War Veterans of the United States (JWV), Marine Corps League (MCL), Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH), Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), and Women's Army Corps Veterans Association (WACVA).



Veteran Suicide and Healthcare

Veteran, Active and Guard/Reserve Suicides and High Mortality Rates Related to Psychiatric Drug Harm: Call for the State of Michigan, the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (USDVA) – and the private sector – to combat suicide *among veterans and active military personnel* by investigating the role of psychiatric drug harm on veterans, which should include, but not be limited to antidepressant withdrawal and the overprescribing of psychiatric medications to Michigan's veterans by the USDVA and/or other medical service providers.

Hyperbaric Oxygen Treatments (HBOTs): Appropriate funds to support a statewide pilot program for Hyperbaric Oxygen Treatment for Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This pilot should also focus on the reduction of opioid dependency, suicide, incarceration, homelessness and divorce rates among veterans with Brain Wounds, upon discharge from service to our nation. HBOTs have shown to be an effective therapy for mental health and reduces the risk of veteran suicides, without the dramatic side effects that can be found with psychopharmaceuticals and other therapies. There are currently eight states (OK, AZ, TX, IN, KY, NC, FL, MD) who have enacted HBOT treatment legislation with total funding of approximately \$3 million, with another \$4.6 million pending this legislative session across the US. A total of 20+ Institutional Review Board HBOT clinical medical trials have been completed since 2007, all demonstrating safety and efficacy of HBOT for TBI/PTSD Veterans.

PACT Act Awareness Statewide: The state should support a campaign to enable the identification, treatment, and compensation of toxic exposures while on active duty, or in a guard or reserve unit. This shall include the implementation of the PACT Act of 2022, at the local, state, and federal levels.

Veterans Treatment Courts: Sustain and expand the operations of Veteran Treatment Courts in order to address behaviors & consequences resulting from PTSD and/or other service connected disabilities. Sufficient funding should be secured to expand the number of Veterans Treatment Courts in Michigan.

Veteran and Family Support

Property Tax Exemption: Continue to support and protect the property tax exemption for 100% disabled Michigan veterans and their surviving spouses. Examine all options presented in the legislative process that do not diminish current benefits.

Make the MVAA a Department: Complete the process, which began in 2013, of establishing the Michigan Department of Veterans Affairs.

- Include a permanent liaison to the Michigan Department of Military Affairs to maintain a solid working relationship.
- Consider the creation of an official oversight board using the standard nominating process to assure essential experience and knowledge of veterans' affairs.

Michigan Veterans Coalition: Legislation for rollover funding, and to maintain, and adjust as necessary, the grant to enable the Michigan Veterans Coalition (MVC) to perform the tasks of filing claims and appeals on behalf of Michigan's veterans and their families. This includes the cases which go to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) on appeal, and as far as the U.S. Court of Veterans Appeals. Assure that it is a standard appropriation (or supplemental) with rollover balances – to stabilize & avoid payment gaps – as is allowed for county veterans' affairs operations.

Michigan Veterans Trust Fund:

- Sustain and support the Michigan Veterans Trust Fund (MVTF) and its programs to help Michigan's veterans and their families during times of need.
- Enact laws which will channel sports gambling tax revenue to the Michigan Veterans Trust Fund – or to another constitutionally protected trust – to the point where it can sustain all of Michigan's Veterans' Programs without using General Fund revenue. The earnings of the trust shall also fund efforts to prevent suicides and pay for future bonuses for past service periods.

Vietnam Veteran Bonus: Consider the extended eligibility and the cost of a bonus for the honorable service of Michigan veterans for the end of the Vietnam Era (1973-75). When created in the 1970s the full bonus promise was not honored in that those who served outside of the official U.S. Dept. of Defense dates for duty in Vietnam, were determined to not be eligible.

Facilities and Projects

Michigan Veterans Homes: Maintain and expand the number of State Veterans Homes in Michigan to accommodate the various veteran population centers in the state. Do so in a manner that meets USDVA, Medicare, and Medicaid standards (Study by State of Michigan recommends seven Veterans Homes).

- Lead the efforts to address the needs of homeless veterans in Michigan.
- Increase the salaries of professional care staff to maintain the highest quality of life.

Veterans Cemetery in the Upper Peninsula: Michigan's veterans who live in the Upper Peninsula (UP) do not have reasonable access to a state or federal veterans' cemetery. The two active national USDVA Veterans' Cemeteries are in Augusta and Holly. A new national or state cemetery in the UP should be created. The geographical rationale for such a location is obvious. If a Federal cemetery is determined to not be a feasible option then a State of Michigan Veterans' Cemetery should be established. It should be created with the aid of the USDVA but operated by the State of Michigan.

Event Accessibility

Special Events Licenses for VSO posts: Increase the number of Special Events Licenses for VSO posts/chapters from 12 to 48.



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