

Questions for the Department of Veterans Affairs Commissioner Nominee

By: Michelle Kirby, Senior Legislative Attorney
February 6, 2019 | 2019-R-0076

Commissioner of Veterans Affairs

The Department of Veterans Affairs commissioner:

1. administers the Veterans Residential Services facility;
2. operates the Office of Advocacy and Assistance for veterans and their spouses, eligible dependents, and other family members;
3. collects and disseminates information on services and facilities available to help veterans;
4. helps veterans to prepare, present, and establish claims, privileges, rights, and other benefits accruing to them under federal, state, and local laws;
5. investigates complaints regarding conduct or treatment of veterans or family members;
6. develops and prepares a long-range plan and mission statement for the Veterans Residential Services facility and the Office of Advocacy and Assistance; and
7. reviews veterans' appeals of denials of admission to various department programs and benefits ([CGS §§ 27-102l](#) and [27-102m](#)).

Questions

1. What do you see as the Veterans' Affairs Department's greatest strength? What do you consider to be its biggest weakness?
2. Describe demographically the state's veterans' population and its primary needs and concerns? What are the projected changes?

3. How has the state's current budgetary situation affected the department? What programs or services have been affected the most? Does the department have enough resources to serve the state's veterans?
4. Property tax exemptions are a common form of veterans' benefits. The legislature has expanded municipal authority to provide these exemptions, most recently in 2018, when it allowed municipalities to increase the income thresholds for certain local option exemptions ([PA 18-102](#)). Besides tax relief, does the state need to provide more direct services to veterans? If so, what services are appropriate?
5. The pretrial diversionary program allows certain veterans to receive services from state and federal veterans affairs departments instead of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services ([CGS §§ 54-56i](#) and [54-56j](#)). How do the services provided by these agencies differ? How effective has this program been? How else can the department help to keep veterans out of jail?
6. According to a September 2018 U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs [report](#), the suicide rate among all veterans decreased slightly but the rate among young veterans increased dramatically. What more do you think can be done to prevent suicides among military veterans at both the national and state levels? What steps can the department take, without new laws, to reduce the suicide rate?
7. What is the veterans' unemployment rate? What job barriers do they face? To what extent does military training prepare veterans for civilian jobs? What types of programs does the department have in place to help veterans obtain jobs?
8. How does the department help homeless veterans find permanent homes? Have its efforts been successful?
9. Federal law and state law each define the term "veterans." One of the department's 2019 legislative proposals is to expand the state's definition. What is the reason for this change? Who will potentially benefit from it?

MK:bd