

# Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee

**Senate Members**  
John W. Fonfara, *Co-Chair*  
John A. Kissel  
Eric D. Coleman  
Anthony Guglielmo  
Joe Markley  
Andrew Maynard

## Connecticut General Assembly

State Capitol Room 506  
Hartford, CT 06106  
Phone (860) 240-0300  
Facsimile (860) 240-0327  
[www.cga.ct.gov/pri/index.asp](http://www.cga.ct.gov/pri/index.asp)

**House Members**  
Christie M. Carpino, *Co-Chair*  
Mary M. Mushinsky  
Whit Betts  
Henry Genga  
Philip Miller  
Cara Pavalock

## STUDY SCOPE

### Department of Veterans' Affairs: Office of Advocacy and Assistance

#### Focus

This study will examine how well the Department of Veterans' Affairs Office of Advocacy and Assistance (OAA) provides "aid and benefit" to veterans, their spouses, and eligible dependents and family members, as required by state statute.

#### Background

The Office of Advocacy and Assistance assists veterans and their eligible family members in obtaining government veteran benefits. Federal law requires anyone – including those employed at OAA – helping veterans get federal benefits to be a Veterans' Service Officer (VSO) accredited by the federal Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Veterans' Service Officers within OAA are responsible for informing veterans and family members about the benefits and services for which they may be eligible, and conducting the following activities:

- assisting in the establishment, preparation and presentation of claims pursuant to rights, benefits or privileges accruing to veterans;
- collecting and preparing data relating to benefits and services for veterans, their spouses, and eligible dependents;
- canvassing nursing homes to determine if veterans and/or spouses are due benefits;
- cooperating with service organizations in disseminating information;
- counseling veterans concerning educational training, health, medical, rehabilitation, housing facilities and services, and employment services; and
- representing veterans before the federal VA concerning claims and benefits.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to its assistance and advocacy responsibilities, OAA is required to annually train veterans' service contact persons at the municipal level.<sup>2</sup> The office also: 1) handles the administrative functions for burial in the state's veterans' cemeteries; 2) maintains the State Veterans' Registry (an electronic database of military discharges); 3) manages the Connecticut

---

<sup>1</sup> Connecticut Department of Veterans' Affairs, <http://www.ct.gov/ctva/cwp/view.asp?a=2014&q=290856&ctvaNav> (accessed April 7, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Any municipality that does not have its own local veterans' advisory committee separate from one or more other municipalities, and does not otherwise provide funding for a veterans' services officer, must designate a city or town employee to serve as a veterans' service contact person.

Wartime Medal and Registry program; and 4) ensures veterans' eligibility under the state's Veteran Flag Identifier program used for driver's licenses.

State law requires the Office of Advocacy and Assistance to have a staff of not less than eight, including six VSOs. All VSOs must be veterans, with at least one who is a woman responsible for addressing the concerns of women veterans, and at least two who are proficient in English and Spanish. A central OAA office is located on the Veterans' Home campus in Rocky Hill, with regional offices located in each of the state's five congressional districts. In FY 14, OAA had 15 staff and an operating budget of \$936,000.

## **Areas of Analysis**

1. Describe the Office of Advocacy and Assistance, including its purpose, organization, functions, responsibilities, and processes to help veterans.
2. Catalogue OAA activities, including the: number of assistance applications received; type of assistance sought, by whom, and for whom; number of applications accepted and denied, and the reasons for denials; number and type of advocacy efforts; and other responsibilities completed by the office.
3. Evaluate OAA's outcomes in assisting accepted applicants, advocating for veterans and their family members, and performing other activities required of the office.
4. Examine whether OAA (and/or the department) evaluates its performance, what measures are used, and if the measures are adequate.
5. Assess OAA's staff workload, resources, and qualifications.
6. Determine whether OAA has a proper outreach plan to inform veterans of available benefits and services, and identify veterans in need of assistance.
7. Gauge veterans' overall satisfaction with services received from OAA.
8. Examine OAA's collaboration and coordination with the federal VA, state agencies, municipalities, and other veterans' service organizations to assist and advocate for veterans.
9. Identify the level and type of input and guidance OAA receives from the state veterans' affairs department's Board of Trustees.

## **Areas Not Under Review**

This study will not re-examine any areas included in the program review committee's 2014 study of the Connecticut State Veterans' Home.

### **PRI Staff Contact**

Jennifer Proto: [jennifer.proto@cga.ct.gov](mailto:jennifer.proto@cga.ct.gov)

Brian Beisel: [brian.beisel@cga.ct.gov](mailto:brian.beisel@cga.ct.gov)