

Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs

2008 End of Year Report

31 December 2008

Executive Summary

In accordance with § 2-1246 of the State Government Article, the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) is submitting its end of year report. According to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), as of August 2008, there are approximately 484,000 veterans in Maryland.

Veterans returning to Maryland are facing greater challenges than have been seen in a generation. Severely wounded personnel, including those suffering Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), will be a stress on the US Department of Veterans Affairs health and benefits systems for decades to come. This is of even greater concern here in Maryland as we see high numbers of National Guard and other reserve component personnel participating in one or more combat tours. At a time when the US Department of Defense and the US Department of Veterans Affairs continue to have difficulty providing timely services to many veterans in need, it is our intent to continue to provide safety nets, wherever possible, here in Maryland to augment and enhance needed support.

To ensure an adequate response to the current needs of Maryland veterans, MDVA actively participated in the Task Force to Study State Assistance to Veterans (SB 873, 2007). The Task Force met several times this past year and their final report was submitted in December 22, 2008.

As Maryland enjoys the successes of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) initiatives, the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs will continue to reach out to the veterans who reside in Maryland. Maryland's focus on supporting our veterans will encourage highly-qualified veterans to relocate to Maryland to fill essential BRAC related jobs thereby positively impacting Maryland's economic development.

In addition, approximately 44,000 of Maryland's veterans are women. Although there are approximately 400 monuments and memorials to veterans in Maryland, none has been dedicated solely to Maryland women who have served or are serving in the uniformed services of the United States of America. Accordingly, MDVA staffed the Commission for the Establishment of a Maryland Women in Military Service Monument. The Commission was created by SB 896 to make recommendations for placement, design, construction and funding of an appropriate monument. A final report was submitted to the Governor and the General Assembly on March 3, 2008.

Through ever-expanding communication to the citizens of Maryland and by engaging individuals and organizations in partnership with MDVA staff and commissions, we continue to promote, develop and support the interests of veterans.

Outreach & Advocacy Program

The Outreach & Advocacy Program is the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs' newest program (HB 3, 2006). Their mission is to find innovative ways to seek out and inform Maryland's veterans about benefits and services that are available from federal, state and local organizations, as well as solicit feedback from veterans regarding their requests and needs for additional services. The Deputy Director position was filled this year bringing the total staffing of the program to two.

To accomplish its mission the Outreach & Advocacy program works closely with multiple local, state and federal agencies and non-profit organizations to coordinate efforts to locate and inform Maryland's veterans as well as to expand benefits and services available to Maryland veterans. Furthermore, the program ensures that legislation impacting veterans, passed by the Maryland General Assembly and signed by the Governor, is properly funded and enforced.

A major initiative implemented this year is the Veterans Muster; an informational seminar and forum designed for Maryland veterans and their families to learn about the benefits and services offered by federal, state and nonprofit agencies. MDVA sends representatives from each of its programs; including a Service Officer to directly assist veterans with filing claims for disability and compensation. Representatives from other state agencies, Veteran Service Organizations, Veteran Employment Representatives, and members of local community organizations are also invited to provide information.

Our goal is to have a veterans muster in each county and Baltimore City within the next 18 months. MDVA has already conducted six musters since May of this year. We were able to connect with over 2500 veterans and their family members through this venue. Additionally, we plan to conduct musters throughout the state at churches, colleges & universities and other appropriate community organizations.

Another initiative of Outreach & Advocacy is the publication of an eight page newsletter, *The Maryland Veteran*, whose distribution has grown from 40,000 to more than 58,000 during CY-08. *The Maryland Veteran* is distributed to individual veterans through various means. It is directly mailed to those persons and organizations on our mail list or our email list. It is also made available at local community centers, veteran service organizations, chambers of commerce, senior centers, public libraries, and military bases in Maryland, Washington, D.C. and Northern Virginia.

In addition to the newsletter, a comprehensive State Benefits & Information Guide was updated and published in summer 2008; it is distributed in the same manner as the newsletter. The current newsletter issue and benefits guide are also included with the Secretary's "Welcome Home" letters sent to recently discharged Maryland Veterans. Also, any person who requests a copy of the guide or the newsletter is then added to our mail or email distribution lists for future mailings.

The Director and Deputy Director conduct periodic one hour classes at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda and the U.S. Naval Academy as part of the Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program (TAP) for military personnel who are separating or retiring from service. Benefits and services available to veterans residing in Maryland are presented and discussed. Similar classes are also conducted at the Maryland National Guard Reintegration Academy. These classes are attended by soldiers and airman returning from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF). The Maryland National Guard Reintegration Academy major training objective is to connect every Soldier with service providers to inform them and their family of the basic benefits to which they are entitled, as well as recognize the challenges of reintegration, how to address these challenges and understand the resources available from the various military, state, county and local agencies.

Outreach & Advocacy is also responsible for maintaining MDVA's website. We have significantly increased the information available on the website. A statewide website redesign is about to be launched early in 2009; this will allow us to make the MDVA website more interactive and user-friendly. Currently, the site includes information regarding services available to Maryland's veterans with links to other state agencies and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Benefits brochures, our newsletters and other documents of interest have been posted to the website in an effort to remotely inform as many of Maryland's veterans as possible.

In furtherance of Outreach & Advocacy's mission - MDVA personnel, from all programs of the Department, attended speaking engagements and made public appearances at hundreds of events in the past year. These events included: Memorial Day, Flag Day, Independence Day and Veterans Day events; VSO conventions; MDVA Veterans Musters; and civic organizations' meetings. These encounters have greatly expanded the number of Maryland veterans and dependents contacted and informed of services and benefits available.

Service Program

The purpose of the Veterans Service Program is to assist veterans, their dependents, and survivors in the preparation, development, and resolution of claims for service-connected disability compensation, pension, death benefits, educational assistance, home loans, medical care, and other benefits available from federal, state and local organizations.

The Service Program responded to 55,571 requests for information from Marylanders.

The program was responsible for filing 2,695 claims on behalf of veterans, dependents and survivors. (The service program does not keep track of claims filed by category.) All claims filed with the service program are processed within the month they are received. The Baltimore office of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USVA) has an average processing time of 183 days for all types of claims received.

The Service Program was further responsible for the receipt of \$17,543,448 in new compensation and pension benefits awarded to veterans represented by the department. It should be noted there is no direct correlation between claims filed and benefits received in a particular year. Many of the claims filed this year will not be decided until 2009, and a majority of the \$17.4 million in receipts was based on claims received in the prior year.

The national average USVA annual disability payment is \$8,890 per veteran. The average disability payment to Maryland veterans is \$7,654, the 3rd lowest in the nation; this is down from \$7,944 in 2005 when Maryland ranked 36th in benefit payments. The State of Maryland has the lowest percentage of veterans who seek assistance through a Power of Attorney (POA) in filing claims for benefits. Having a POA is one of the factors that affects rate of disability payment in a positive manner. Veterans with POA's receive greater disability payments, than those who do not.

The Service Program is the repository for all DD-214s for Maryland veterans who were discharged since October 15, 1979. The service program received 11,001 DD-214s from October 2007 through June 2008. In an effort to reach recently discharge veterans, the program in October 2007, established a data base to track all DD-214s received. Both the Governor and Secretary of the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs are using addresses in this data base to send welcome home letters to all honorably discharged veterans. Through this effort we anticipate more veterans will seek assistance through our program when seeking USVA benefits. The data base will also be used by the service program's Women Veterans Coordinator to identify recently discharged women veterans and send them a letter regarding available services. In addition, the Women Veterans Coordinator is working with the Maryland National Guard, in both their Post Deployment Health Re-Assessment (PDHRA) and Reintegration programs. She is also working with the USVA Health Care System Veteran Centers in addressing the needs of women veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and sexual trauma issues.

The most valuable services offered to all veterans are the availability of claims assistance through the service program, admission to our veterans' home when necessary, burial in one of our five veteran's cemeteries, and a place to remember their service at one of our three memorials.

Our new full time office in Bel-Air opened on October 1, 2008. The Bel-Air office is under the full time supervision of our Northern/Eastern Area Supervisor located in Hurlock. A new area supervisor position was established for our Southern/Western Service Area headquartered in Frederick Md.

Cemetery & Memorial Programs

The Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs Cemetery Program maintains five (5) State veterans' cemeteries, providing a final resting place for those eligible Maryland veterans and their eligible dependents who desire this benefit provided by the State of Maryland. The five State Veterans Cemeteries include Crownsville in Anne Arundel

County, Cheltenham in Prince George's County, Eastern Shore in Dorchester County, Garrison Forest in Baltimore County and Rocky Gap in Allegany County. The Cemetery Program also oversees a Civil War Cemetery at Rose Hill Cemetery in Hagerstown.

Since the programs inception in the mid-1970s, more than 70,500 of Maryland's veterans and their dependents have been interred at our five veterans' cemeteries. This requires the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs not only to conduct burial services, but also provide perpetual care on the ever-increasing expansion of grave sites in accordance with National Cemetery Standards (NCA) within the system. Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs is a leader among the nation in State veteran's cemeteries with three out of the five cemeteries among the top ten busiest cemeteries in FY-2008 and where the State conducts the highest number of interments throughout the nation.

The facilities provide interment services during the normal business week (Monday through Friday) and are open to the public 365 days a year. The Cemetery Program maintains and operates the cemeteries, sets the eligibility requirements for burial and manages the day-to-day operations and records. There was an average of 3,182 interments annually over the past three years. The annual interment rate represents 21% of Maryland veteran's deaths.

Interment is the most important function carried out in the cemetery where we ensure the honor and dignity of our veterans and their families is performed for every interment. The operations and maintenance (perpetual care) ensure that our State Veterans Cemeteries are maintained as national shrines, dedicated to preserving our nation's and State's history, nurturing patriotism and honoring the service and sacrifice veterans and their families have made.

Veterans Home Program

Located in St. Mary's County, Charlotte Hall Veterans Home (CHVH) is a 462 bed facility reduced from a 504 bed facility which provides assisted-living and skilled nursing care for Maryland Veterans and eligible spouses who are unable to take care of themselves due to age or disability. In October 2008, the USVA approved a request to reduce the Assisted (Domiciliary) beds from 226 to 184 (42 beds). This request which reduced the original capacity from a 504 bed to a 462 bed was a result of the nursing shortage, location of CHVH and the need for additional support staff office space.

The census as of January 2008 had 367 residents with 137 assisted living and 230 comprehensive nursing which included nine non-veteran spouses. Subsequently, the December 2008 census for CHVH had 142 assisted living residents and 248 comprehensive nursing for a total of 390 which included fourteen non-veteran spouses. The overall census increased nearly 5% since the beginning of 2008 and rose to an all time high of 390 residents in December 2008.

The new Request For Proposal (RFP) for Management Services was issued November 21, 2008 and a Pre-Bid Conference for the RFP was held December 4, 2008. Bids are due February 3, 2009.

In the past year, CHVH has completed several projects to expand services and benefits offered to the residents.

- A new Multi-Media Center opened to assist volunteers and staff in recording veteran oral histories. The room was furnished and equipped with donated funds.
- The dental suite renovation project is underway. The Department of General Services (DGS) is overseeing this project and expects demolition and renovation to take 6-9 months once a contractor is selected. When completed, the renovation and expansion will increase the chairs from 2 to 3 and will include wheelchair capability, state-the-art equipment, storage area and a waiting room.
- Computerized Patient Record System (CPRS) – the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) & Server Agreement with the USVA was signed on September 4th 2008. Once installed, CHVH will be the first state veteran's home in the nation to have this level of coordination with the VA. Phase-In meetings have begun with the intent to go live early 2009.
- A new flag pole at the Rte 5 entrance was donated by the American Legion, Post #221. A dedication was conducted on November 8th as part of the Open House event.

MDVA 2008 Significant Accomplishments

- The Service Program represented veterans filing new VA claims resulted in significant increase in compensation and pension benefits awarded to the Maryland veterans.
- The Cemetery Program completed its burial expansion project at Crownsville Veterans Cemetery and 95% at Cheltenham Veterans Cemetery, additional expansion projects started at the Garrison Forest Veterans Cemetery.
- Outreach & Advocacy began the Veterans Muster Initiative in May, 2008. Six musters were conducted and attended by over 2500 veterans and their family members.
- *The Maryland Veteran*, the Department's bi-annual newsletter published by Outreach & Advocacy, saw an increase in distribution from 40,000 to over 58,000.
- The Military Reservist and Service-Disabled Veteran No-Interest Loan Program (HB 1280, 2006) delivered its first two loans through the Department of Business and Economic Development in support of the economic challenges experienced in the Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business community.

- MDVA is now on Facebook thus reaching a greater number of Maryland veterans here and abroad. Since July 2008 MDVA received 854 new friends.
- Encouraged the establishment of local Commissions on Veterans Affairs that will advise local government on veterans' issues. Commissions have been established in Prince George's, Anne Arundel, Cecil and Montgomery counties and Baltimore City.
- Fostered the partnership between our MDVA Cemetery Program and the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) Incarcerated Veterans Pre-release Program. This partnership implemented the Incarcerated Veterans Work Program.
- Participated in a summit hosted by the Maryland Military Department where the directorates of various military and veteran organizations were brought together to share information.
- Developed interactive working relationships with neighboring State Departments of Veterans Affairs through our membership in the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA).
- Improved and expanded the MDVA website to include extensive information regarding benefits and services offered to veterans by other state agencies.
- Collaborated on projects with the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD), and the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) to ensure veterans with physical and mental disabilities receive the care and services they need.
- Partnered with the Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation (DLLR) to promote the use of Veterans Employment Representatives at the One Stop Career Centers and the use of the Maryland Workforce Exchange system through our Veterans Muster Initiative.

Cemetery Program 2008 Highlights

- 95% completion of capital construction burial expansion projects at Cheltenham and Crownsville State Veterans Cemeteries through \$5,649,000.00 of 100% funded USVA approved grants which includes, grave sites, columbarium's, irrigation systems, roadway and curbs, and building construction and renovation.
- Cemetery grant for Garrison Forest Expansion was approved for \$ 4,448,885.00 for cemetery burial expansion, columbarium's, irrigation systems, roadway and curbs. A pre-application grant for Garrison Forest Administration & Maintenance complex is also being submitted for \$5,100,000.00.

- For FY 2010 Pre-Applications were submitted for Eastern Shore Veterans Cemetery Columbarium total Grant: \$ 400,000.00 & Rocky Gap Veterans Cemetery Columbarium total Grant: \$ 250,000.00
- Cemetery committee at Eastern Shore Cemetery donated & replaced 80 Chairs at the Committal Shelter at a cost of \$4,800.00
- Upgraded cemetery equipment with two articulating Site Dumpers for Crownsville & Garrison Forest to ensure the continuation of proper burial techniques and gravesite maintenance.
- Purple Heart Monument donated by Military Order of Purple Heart at a cost of \$ 5,600.00 and placed at Cheltenham Veterans Cemetery.
- Cheltenham Volunteer Committee donated \$3,500.00 for installation of 16 trees to beautify the cemetery.
- Rocky Gap cemetery staff sealed concrete at plaza and sidewalks for \$981.00 saving the State of Maryland \$ 2000.00 for a contractor completing the project.
- Rocky Gap resealed asphalt (perma seal) in cemetery for \$7,000.00 extending life of roadways in cemetery.
- Installed stained glass windows through donations from cemetery committees at Crownsville & Eastern Shore Cemeteries totaling \$20,000.00.
- Incarcerated Veterans Project are Honorably Discharged Veterans in the Pre-Release Division of Corrections. Crownsville and Garrison Forest each have a crew of 6-8 inmates for maintenance projects.
- Conducted Memorial Day and Veterans Day events at all five Maryland State Veterans Cemeteries honoring the service and sacrifices of our State's veterans.
- Conducted Wreaths Across America events at all five Maryland State Veterans Cemeteries honoring the service and sacrifices of our State's veterans.

Business Assistance

Aid to service-disabled veterans and military reservists or National Guard personnel called to active duty (HB 1280) was passed in the 2006 session of the Maryland General Assembly. The legislation provides zero interest loans to businesses owned by military reservists and National Guard personnel called to active duty and service disabled veterans. These loans are intended to provide financial support to businesses owned by military personnel called to active duty, and to defray expenses incurred by a business owner renovating his or her business to install adaptive equipment to accommodate a service-disabled veteran employee. Two applications were submitted

for consideration to the Department of Business and Economic Development in December 2008.

In the 2008 legislative session, Veteran-Owned and Disabled Veteran-Owned Small businesses (HB 1431) were granted a competitive advantage in the bidding process with the University System of Maryland, the Department of General Services, and the Department of Transportation through a Price Preference Program.

Operating Costs

Outreach and Advocacy	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009
	expenditures	expenditures	appropriation
postage	21,558.20	23,822	23,200
Cellular telephone	1,247.23	1,643	2,100
travel - in-state	2,252.39	2,697	3,500
travel conferences/seminars	944.87	1,186	3,000
travel out-of-state	16,783.96	-	-
advertising	-	3,851	3,500
printing	23,632.00	28,637	24,000
office equipment	2,873.00	-	-
Total	69,291.65	61,836	59,300

Memorials and Monuments

Currently, Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs Cemetery and Memorial Program has responsibility for the following memorials:

- World War II Memorial in Annapolis
- Korean War Memorial in Baltimore
- Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Baltimore
- Joint responsibility with the City of Baltimore for the War Memorial Building

These facilities are open 365 days a year in recognition of those who served and those who made the ultimate sacrifice to secure our freedom and democracy.

Memorials 2008 Highlights

- Fourteen (14) patriotic events were held at the memorials throughout the year, including Memorial Day, Veterans Day, Pearl Harbor Remembrance and other special commemorations.

- Completed repair and reset front steps of the War Memorial Building through approved DGS funding of \$82,081.00

Commissions and Boards

There are three commissions to advise the Secretary in various areas:

- Maryland Veterans Commission
- Charlotte Hall Veterans Home Commission
- War Memorial Commission
- Washington Cemetery Board of Trustees

Maryland Veterans Commission

The Maryland Veterans Commission advises the Secretary on all issues relating to veterans, including legislation. Individuals may be called upon to represent the Department at speaking engagements for commemorative events, present Governor's Proclamations on Veterans Day and Memorial Day ceremonies, and provide recommendations when changes may be requested for the Cemetery & Memorial Programs. The members also review proposed veteran-related legislation and advise the Secretary accordingly.

Twenty-eight Maryland veterans groups comprise the Commission, representing veteran groups and various geographical areas. The Commissioners are appointed to five-year terms by the Governor, who also names the Chair. The Maryland Veterans Commissioners represent the following organizations or categories:

- American Legion
- American Ex POW's
- American Veterans AMVETS
- Battle of the Bulge
- Black Veterans of All Wars
- Catholic War Veterans
- Disabled American Veterans
- Fleet Reserve Association
- Jewish War Veterans
- Korean War Veterans
- Marine Corps League
- Military Officers Association of America
- Military Order of the Purple Heart
- Pearl Harbor Survivors
- Polish War Veterans
- The Retired Enlisted Association
- Vietnam Veterans of America

- Women Veterans
- World War II

In addition to the Commissioners representing the above named organizations, there is a Commissioner designated to represent each of the eight congressional districts, as a geographic entity.

Maryland Veterans Home Commission

The Maryland Veterans Home Commission advises the Department on issues relating to State veteran homes and interacts with veterans and other organizations to disseminate information concerning Charlotte all Veterans Home, in St. Mary's County, the only State veteran facility in Maryland. The Commission has fourteen members. Eleven are named to five-year terms by the Governor with Senate advice and consent. Three serve ex-officio, representing the Governor, Speaker of the House and President of the Senate.

War Memorial Commission

The Commission has custody and supervision of the War Memorial Building and the War Memorial Plaza. Both were erected in 1927 in Baltimore to honor those Marylanders who died in World War I. The War Memorial Building lies directly across from City Hall, and with the Plaza, was designed by Baltimore architect, Lawrence Hall Fowler. The Building is open and available for meetings of veterans groups, patriotic societies and for civic gatherings. Use by these groups is permitted provided that no collection or donation is taken nor any admission charged. Maintenance costs are shared equally by the State of Maryland and the City of Baltimore. The Commission's ten members serve five-year terms. Five are appointed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs with the Governor's approval, and five by the Mayor of Baltimore.

Washington Cemetery Board of Trustees

The Cemetery's Board of Trustees was chartered in 1870. Originally, it was to have had five members: three from Maryland and one each from Virginia and West Virginia. Virginia and West Virginia contributed to the cost for funding and maintaining the Cemetery initially and so were given a place on the Board. In over one hundred and thirty years, however, neither Virginia nor West Virginia has appointed a representative. Of recent significance, was the rebuilding and restoration of the original 1866 Speakers Stand at the Rose Hill Cemetery.

**General Assessment of the Status of Maryland Veterans Demographics
According to VA Census Data**

Maryland Veterans Population.....	484,000 (Approx)
Maryland Veterans Age 65 and Older.....	166,715
Maryland Women Veterans.....	47,949
County with Most Veterans: Prince George's.....	70,225
County with Fewest Veterans: Kent.....	2,203

**Key Performance Measures for Veterans Represented By the Maryland
Department of Veterans Affairs Fiscal Year 2008**

Inputs

Potential number of veterans to be served.....	484,000 (Approx)
Number of veteran contacts.....	67,500 (Approx)

Outputs

Claims filed and developed on behalf of service-connected disabled veteran.....	2,695
Active cases for veterans represented by the MDVA.....	9,700
Appeals of unfavorable VA decisions filed on behalf of veterans.....	226

Outcomes

VA awards for Service-connected claims.....	\$8,832,047
VA awards for totally disabled non-service connected claims.....	\$4,730,402
VA awards for widows and orphans of veterans.....	<u>\$3,980,999</u>
Total of awards to veterans and survivors represented by MDVA.....	\$17,543,448

**Estimated Impact of Current Military Operations on the Needs of
Future Veterans**

The estimated impact of current military operations on the future needs of veterans will continue to be seen in the increased requests for claims counseling and assistance. Our National Guard members and Maryland's regular service veterans who are activated, as well as Maryland veterans who served on active duty in the military, are eligible for state and federal veteran benefits. Recent studies have suggested that returning veterans from the Southwest Asia Theater continue to have a higher demand for counseling and assistance. There are outstanding issues regarding Gulf War illnesses, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). The USVA Capital Healthcare system (of which Maryland is a part) has treated over 7,000 veterans who have served in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom (OIF/OEF). The exact number of requests for additional assistance and counseling is unknown at this time. Although we had three additional service officers positions approved during the last General Assembly, additional veteran service officer staffing may be required to meet an increased demand for services, as well as additional service office locations based on demographics and census – a general fund issue.

There is a separate, albeit significant concern for difficulties faced by women veterans. We, like the USVA, are still learning about the unique issues that effect female veterans compared to their male counterparts. Better understanding of these issues will enable us to develop outreach efforts that target women veterans and help them address these issues.

Another item of impact is the Base Realignment and Closure Commission's (BRAC) decision to consolidate various military and federal offices to Fort George G. Meade, Aberdeen Army Proving Grounds and the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda. Both Fort Meade and Aberdeen have been identified as major growth areas for consolidation of services. One aspect of this realignment will be the convergence of high tech companies and defense contractors in Maryland. These employers are likely to seek veterans to fill positions created by BRAC because of their desirable military backgrounds, security clearances, work habits and education. In light of all this, it is expected that there will be an influx of young veterans to our communities to take advantage of the employment opportunities offered by these companies. Concurrently, this surge of new veterans will increase the demand for dependent services. Currently Maryland's veteran's population is the third youngest across the country at 55 years old. The challenge will be how best to inform the veterans and their families of services and benefits to which they are entitled and to ensure that the State can provide for the resulting expansion of local infrastructure in the community. Also, this talented workforce is mobile. It is in the State's interest to retain citizens with this level of expertise and family structure now and in the years to come. Therefore, it is a concern that as veterans retire from civilian employment they might leave Maryland. Improvements to the tax benefits for our retiring civilian veterans would help to retain the population.

Current military operations, as with previous military operations, will produce a new generation of veterans with special needs. Today World War II veterans are aging; all are beyond 70 years in age. Many of these veterans have been dependent upon the system for more than 60 years as a result of injuries, diseases and disabilities suffered while exposed to battlefield conditions. For recent veterans of combat and other exposures, access to medical care will be paramount in their recovery. Government agencies at all levels, private and non-profits and the veterans' community should plan and prepare for long term assistance to veterans with medical and special needs.

Mental Health Services

The 2008 session of the Maryland General Assembly was very successful for military and veteran related legislation. Out of sixty (60) bills that were introduced, Twenty (20) passed. In particular, the legislature passed Senate Bill 210 which established the State Veterans Behavioral Health Advisory Board (Board), chaired by the Lt. Governor, to examine and identify the gaps in behavioral health services available to Maryland veterans. The Board will make recommendations to the Governor, the president of the Senate, the Speaker of the House, and the Secretaries of the involved departments for the expansion or development of certain health services needed to fill

these gaps for Maryland veterans. Moreover, included in the legislation was the establishment of a behavioral health initiative within the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to assist veterans in rural Maryland gain access to US Department of Veteran Affairs care and where needed, fill any voids with state resources. An initial \$2.8 million of the Governor's proposed \$3.5 million was approved in the budget. The first Advisory Board meeting was held on September 25th in St Mary's County with follow-up meetings scheduled in January, February, May and August 2009 in various regions in Maryland.

Projected Conditions Affecting Future Services at MDVA

- Aging and declining veteran population base - WW II and Korean War veterans and their dependents.
- Southwest Asia ongoing combat operations – returning veterans and their dependents.
- The lack of awareness among veterans and their dependents of the services and benefits available to them.
- Limited resources within the Outreach and Advocacy Program to reach the approximate 484,000 Maryland veterans and their families and advise them of the benefits and services available to them.