

DIVISION OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS

MISSION

The Division of Veterans' Affairs assists veterans, members of the armed forces and their families and dependents in securing benefits earned through military service. The Division coordinates veterans' programs and services offered by other State agencies, works closely with the Federal Department of Veterans' Affairs and advocates State and Federal actions to meet veterans' needs. The Division serves 1.1 million New Yorkers who are veterans, as well as their dependents and those on active duty.

ORGANIZATION AND STAFFING

The Division is headed by a Director who is appointed by the Governor. The Division's central office is in Albany, with regional offices in New York City and Buffalo. The Division staffs a network of approximately 70 community based access points in nearly all of the State's counties and New York City. The Office of General Services will continue to provide administrative support, permitting the Division to focus on its main mission.

BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

The Executive Budget recommends **\$18 million in All Funds (\$15.7 million General Fund, \$2.3 million Other Funds)** in new appropriations for the Division of Veterans' Affairs. This is an increase of **\$900,000 (increase of \$2.6 million General Fund and \$1.7 million decrease in the Community Projects Fund)** from the 2007-08 budget. This net change primarily reflects additional payments to veterans and families of deceased veterans.

The Executive Budget recommends a staffing level of 113 for the Division of Veterans Affairs, an increase from the 2007-08 budget of one position to manage two new veterans' benefits programs.

Major budget actions include:

- **Blind Veteran Annuity**: The 2008-09 Executive Budget includes a \$220,000 General Fund increase for the Blind Veteran Annuity Assistance Program to accommodate the annual cost-of-living increase to benefits.
- **Gold Star Parent Annuity**: Chapter 399 of the Laws of 2007 established the Gold Star Annuity to provide assistance to eligible families of deceased veterans. The 2008-09 Executive Budget includes \$650,000 for payments associated with this new benefit.
- **Merchant Marine Bonus**: Chapter 325 of the Laws of 2007 extended benefits for veterans of World War II, originally established by the laws of 1947, to merchant marines. The Division of Veterans Affairs will begin making these award payments in 2008-09.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

The Veterans' Counseling Program, the largest of the Division of Veterans' Affairs' four programs, provides benefits counseling and claims services through a statewide network of State veterans' benefits counselors. The counselors — who are all veterans— help veterans complete and file applications for Federal, State, local and private veterans'

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benefits. Veterans' counselors also help veterans access the services provided by Veterans' Affairs Medical Centers, senior centers, State Veterans' Homes, local nursing homes and public assistance offices.

The Division of Veterans' Affairs is responsible for securing a substantial portion of the more than \$1.25 billion annually in recurring Federal VA compensation and pension payments made directly to New York State veterans and their dependents. State veterans' counselors file more than 8,600 benefit claims annually that result in approximately \$65 million in new and recurring Federal benefits. The average compensation award for each veteran represented by State veterans' counselors exceeds \$11,500 annually. State veterans' counselors also assist constituents in obtaining additional veterans benefits, including VA medical care, various other Federal, State and local economic assistance, tax exemptions and a variety of other benefits offered in recognition of military service. Additionally, with the enactment of New York Patriot Plans in 2003, 2004, and 2005, State veterans' counselors help to ensure that active duty military personnel and their families receive the supplemental benefits to which they are now entitled.

The Veterans' Counseling Program also oversees State assistance to county and city veterans' service agencies. Fifty-seven counties and seven cities receive reimbursement for a substantial portion of their costs associated with programs serving veterans.

The Blind Veteran Annuity Program provides visually impaired veterans and eligible surviving spouses with monthly assistance. In 2008-09, this program will assist more than 4,500 recipients. Legislation approved in 2004 provided for an annual cost of living increase to maintain the value of the benefit paid to each recipient.

The Veterans' Education Program certifies post-secondary educational and vocational programs as providing quality education and training to veterans eligible for Federal G. I. education benefits. The program staff reviews and approves thousands of programs for use by veterans, ensuring a wide variety of career training and educational opportunities for veterans and eligible dependents and survivors.

The Division has been tasked with administration of two new programs beginning in 2008-09: the Merchant Marine Bonus and the Gold Star Parent Annuity. Until 1988, veteran status was not conferred to merchant marines by the Federal government. In recognition of this change, Chapter 325 of the Laws of 2007 extends payment of a one time war bonus established in 1947 to merchant marines. Beginning in 2008-09, a \$250 bonus will be provided to members of the Merchant Marines who served satisfactorily on ocean going voyages during World War II but were not eligible for the original bonus. The Gold Star Parent Annuity awards payment to parents of deceased veterans who meet Federal "Gold Star" requirements.

The Division of Veterans' Affairs continues to maintain its community outreach activities through senior citizens' seminars and similar forums for women veterans. In addition, it is the driving force behind the Interagency Veterans' Council, a consortium of Federal, State and local agencies and non-profit organizations that meets periodically to address and resolve problems and concerns within the veteran community. The Division also collaborates with other State agencies to better identify veterans and their dependents on public assistance, to assist them in securing Federal veterans' benefits to which they are entitled, and to advise senior citizens of veterans' benefits and services that could improve the quality of their lives.

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ALL FUNDS APPROPRIATIONS (dollars)

Category	Available 2007-08	Appropriations Recommended 2008-09	Change	Reappropriations Recommended 2008-09
State Operations	8,737,000	8,332,000	(405,000)	3,319,000
Aid To Localities	8,359,300	9,700,000	1,340,700	1,255,000
Capital Projects	0	0	0	0
Total	<u>17,096,300</u>	<u>18,032,000</u>	<u>935,700</u>	<u>4,574,000</u>

ALL FUND TYPES PROJECTED LEVELS OF EMPLOYMENT BY PROGRAM FILLED ANNUAL SALARIED POSITIONS

Program	Full-Time Equivalent Positions (FTE)		
	2007-08 Estimated FTEs 03/31/08	2008-09 Estimated FTEs 03/31/09	FTE Change
Administration			
General Fund	9	10	1
Higher Education			
Special Revenue Funds - Federal	12	12	0
Veteran Counseling Services Program			
General Fund	91	91	0
Total	<u>112</u>	<u>113</u>	<u>1</u>

STATE OPERATIONS ALL FUNDS FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS BY FUND TYPE APPROPRIATIONS (dollars)

Fund Type	Available 2007-08	Recommended 2008-09	Change
General Fund	6,383,000	6,478,000	95,000
Special Revenue Funds - Federal	2,354,000	1,854,000	(500,000)
Total	<u>8,737,000</u>	<u>8,332,000</u>	<u>(405,000)</u>

STATE OPERATIONS ALL FUNDS FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS BY PROGRAM APPROPRIATIONS (dollars)

Program	Available 2007-08	Recommended 2008-09	Change
Administration			
General Fund	827,000	922,000	95,000
Higher Education			
Special Revenue Funds - Federal	1,854,000	1,854,000	0
Veteran Counseling Services Program			
General Fund	5,556,000	5,556,000	0
Special Revenue Funds - Federal	500,000	0	(500,000)
Total	<u>8,737,000</u>	<u>8,332,000</u>	<u>(405,000)</u>

STATE OPERATIONS - GENERAL FUND SUMMARY OF PERSONAL SERVICE APPROPRIATIONS AND CHANGES 2008-09 RECOMMENDED (dollars)

Program	Total		Personal Service Regular (Annual Salaried)	
	Amount	Change	Amount	Change
Administration	767,000	55,000	767,000	55,000
Veteran Counseling Services Program	5,061,000	0	5,061,000	0
Total	<u>5,828,000</u>	<u>55,000</u>	<u>5,828,000</u>	<u>55,000</u>

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**STATE OPERATIONS - GENERAL FUND
SUMMARY OF NONPERSONAL SERVICE AND MAINTENANCE UNDISTRIBUTED
APPROPRIATIONS AND CHANGES
2008-09 RECOMMENDED
(dollars)**

Program	Total		Supplies and Materials	
	Amount	Change	Amount	Change
Administration	155,000	40,000	11,000	0
Veteran Counseling Services Program	495,000	0	50,000	0
Total	<u>650,000</u>	<u>40,000</u>	<u>61,000</u>	<u>0</u>

Program	Travel		Contractual Services	
	Amount	Change	Amount	Change
Administration	16,000	0	97,000	40,000
Veteran Counseling Services Program	119,000	0	266,000	0
Total	<u>135,000</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>363,000</u>	<u>40,000</u>

Program	Equipment	
	Amount	Change
Administration	31,000	0
Veteran Counseling Services Program	60,000	0
Total	<u>91,000</u>	<u>0</u>

**STATE OPERATIONS - OTHER THAN GENERAL FUND
SUMMARY OF APPROPRIATIONS AND CHANGES
2008-09 RECOMMENDED
(dollars)**

Program	Total		Personal Service	
	Amount	Change	Amount	Change
Higher Education	1,854,000	0	1,086,000	0
Veteran Counseling Services Program	0	(500,000)	0	0
Total	<u>1,854,000</u>	<u>(500,000)</u>	<u>1,086,000</u>	<u>0</u>

Program	Nonpersonal Service	
	Amount	Change
Higher Education	768,000	0
Veteran Counseling Services Program	0	(500,000)
Total	<u>768,000</u>	<u>(500,000)</u>

**AID TO LOCALITIES
ALL FUNDS FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS BY FUND TYPE
APPROPRIATIONS
(dollars)**

Fund Type	Available 2007-08	Recommended 2008-09	Change
General Fund	8,359,300	9,200,000	840,700
Special Revenue Funds - Federal	0	500,000	500,000
Total	<u>8,359,300</u>	<u>9,700,000</u>	<u>1,340,700</u>

**AID TO LOCALITIES
ALL FUNDS FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS BY PROGRAM
APPROPRIATIONS
(dollars)**

Program	Available 2007-08	Recommended 2008-09	Change
Administration			
General Fund	200,000	2,550,000	2,350,000
Blind Veteran Annuity Assistance			
General Fund	5,500,000	5,720,000	220,000
Veteran Counseling Services Program			
General Fund	930,000	930,000	0
Special Revenue Funds - Federal	0	500,000	500,000
Community Projects			
General Fund	1,729,300	0	(1,729,300)
Total	<u>8,359,300</u>	<u>9,700,000</u>	<u>1,340,700</u>