

DIVISION OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS

MISSION

The core mission of the Division of Veterans' Affairs is to link veterans, members of the armed forces and their families and dependents to various economic, medical and social benefits and services available as the result of active duty military service. The Division's professional counseling staff prepares, presents and prosecutes claims including applications for monthly compensation and pension awards, education benefits, burial benefits, vocational rehabilitation training, health care, nursing home care, tax exemption and other services.

The Division is committed to fulfilling its statutory responsibility within the fiscal resources of its budget, and will continue to offer, through a network of community-based veterans counseling offices, accessible professional assistance to 1.1 million veterans and their dependents, as well as to thousands of New Yorkers currently on active military duty.

ORGANIZATION AND STAFFING

The Division is headed by the Director who is appointed by the Governor. The Division's central office is in Albany, with regional and claims processing offices in New York City and Buffalo. The Division maintains a network of 69 local points of access, both full-time and itinerant, where the veteran's community can obtain information and assistance from the Division's veterans counseling staff.

The Division maximizes its presence in the veterans community by establishing office locations that are readily accessible to veterans, such as United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical centers and community outpatient clinics, providing veterans seeking medical care an opportunity to also secure counseling assistance at a single location. These locations provide a collateral benefit for the agency, which is provided free office space, thereby reducing costs associated with securing rented office space.

To further expand its outreach and accessibility, more than half of the Division's State veterans counselors are assigned to multiple offices, providing direct, local services in a greater number of communities throughout the State. In 2009-10, mobile counseling services will be provided, further expanding services to veterans and their families.

BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

The Executive Budget recommends **\$17.7 million in All Funds** (\$15.2 million General Fund; \$2.5 million Other Funds) in new appropriations for the Division of Veterans' Affairs. This is a net decrease of **\$3.0 million** from the 2008-09 Budget. This net change reflects the expiration of the Merchant Marines Program, offset by \$1.0 million for expanded counseling services and the restoration of the temporary reductions to the Blind Veterans Annuity.

The Executive Budget recommends a **staffing level of 112** for the Division of Veterans Affairs, an increase of four full time positions from 2008-09.

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PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

The largest of the Division of Veterans' Affairs three principal programs is the Veterans' Counseling Program. In State fiscal year 2009-10, new claims for Federal benefits that provide direct, economic (and generally recurring) assistance to veterans and their families, are expected to exceed the \$79 million in VA payments for compensation and pension for disabled and low-income veterans and dependents paid during 2007-08.

Similarly, claims filed and awards issued during the current 2009 calendar year are on a pace to match or exceed those of recent years. The Division of Veterans' Affairs' VA accredited counseling staff is responsible for securing and maintaining a substantial portion of the \$1.25 billion in Federal VA benefits paid annually to veterans and dependents in New York State. The Division, in collaboration with other State, Federal, local and not-for-profit agencies, continued its efforts to assist returning active duty military personnel in 2008. In July 2008, the Division of Veterans' Affairs together with the Division of Military and Naval Affairs and the Office of Mental Health added behavioral health screening for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury to the informational outreach programs throughout the State for returning Guard units and their families. This provides the Division an opportunity to disseminate information about benefits and familiarize veterans and their families with services offered by the Agency's counseling staff.

The Division is involved in the National Policy Academy for returning veterans; a public-private collaborative aimed at developing strategies to improve services provided to returning veterans needing assistance with human, social and economic challenges. Through the National Policy Academy, the New York State team has explored new approaches for helping returning veterans and their families address problems and concerns in such areas as finances and insurance, family relationships, health and mental health care, substance abuse issues, employment and complex medical injuries. The team's recommendation has led to a consolidated plan to better serve veterans and their families. The development of a comprehensive strategy to help returning veterans and their families has been one of the Division's highest priorities.

The Division also partners with the New York State Department of Health and the State University of New York at Stony Brook to assist veterans and eligible dependents in gaining admission to the State Veterans Home Program that operates five long-term healthcare facilities around the State.

State Veterans Counselors – each a veteran – also assist veterans in accessing the VA's network of health care, State veterans' homes and nursing homes, as well as local public assistance and private venues that offer programs or services.

The Division is now being fully hosted by the Office of General Services, which provides various administrative and information technology functions for the Division.

VETERANS' EDUCATION PROGRAM

The Veterans' Education Program staff – located in Albany and New York City – investigates and certifies post-secondary educational and vocational institutions as providing legitimate and quality education for veterans seeking to utilize their Federal education benefits to attend such facilities. The Veterans Education Bureau also is responsible for approving on-the-job training and apprenticeship programs. The Office of General Services provides administrative support for this program.

BLIND ANNUITY PROGRAM

The Blind Annuity Program provides visually impaired veterans and eligible un-remarried surviving spouses an annual annuity paid in monthly installments. The statute creating the annual adjustment provides for an increase of one to four percent each year. The Division of Veterans' Affairs processes applications and authorizes awards with administrative support provided by the Office of General Services. Currently there are more than 4,500 annuitants receiving benefits.

SUPPLEMENTAL BURIAL BENEFIT PROGRAM

Families of members of the armed forces killed in combat or who die while serving in a hostile theater of operation are eligible for a Supplemental Burial Benefit, established in 2003 under the Governor's Patriot Plan II, that provides a maximum reimbursement of \$6,000 to defray funeral and burial expenses. The Division processes applications and authorizes payment of the benefit to qualified individuals responsible for burial costs.

GOLD STAR PARENT ANNUITY

Awards annual annuities to parents of veterans who are identified as "Gold Star Parents" in the amount of \$500 per parent, not to exceed \$1000 per veteran. Any Gold Star Parent, who is the parent of a deceased veteran, and a resident of New York State with an income at or below 200 percent of the Federal poverty level, shall be eligible for the annuity.

**ALL FUNDS
APPROPRIATIONS
(dollars)**

Category	Available 2008-09	Appropriations Recommended 2009-10	Change	Reappropriations Recommended 2009-10
State Operations	8,868,000	9,261,000	393,000	5,121,000
Aid To Localities	11,845,550	8,446,000	(3,399,550)	614,000
Capital Projects	0	0	0	0
Total	20,713,550	17,707,000	(3,006,550)	5,735,000

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

Full-Time Equivalent Positions (FTE)

Program	2008-09 Estimated FTEs 03/31/09	2009-10 Estimated FTEs 03/31/10	FTE Change
Administration			
General Fund	7	7	0
Higher Education			
Special Revenue Funds - Federal	12	12	0
Veteran Counseling Services Program			
General Fund	89	93	4
Total	108	112	4

VETERANS' AFFAIRS

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

<u>Fund Type</u>	<u>Available 2008-09</u>	<u>Recommended 2009-10</u>	<u>Change</u>
General Fund	6,902,000	7,295,000	393,000
Special Revenue Funds - Federal	1,966,000	1,966,000	0
Total	8,868,000	9,261,000	393,000

Adjustments:

Transfer(s) From	
Special Pay Bill	
General Fund	(424,000)
Special Revenue Funds - Federal	(112,000)
Appropriated 2008-09	8,332,000

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

<u>Program</u>	<u>Available 2008-09</u>	<u>Recommended 2009-10</u>	<u>Change</u>
Administration			
General Fund	922,000	941,000	19,000
Special Revenue Funds - Federal	85,000	0	(85,000)
Higher Education			
General Fund	136,000	0	(136,000)
Special Revenue Funds - Federal	1,881,000	1,966,000	85,000
Veteran Counseling Services Program			
General Fund	5,844,000	6,354,000	510,000
Total	8,868,000	9,261,000	393,000

STATE OPERATIONS - GENERAL FUND SUMMARY OF PERSONAL SERVICE APPROPRIATIONS AND CHANGES 2009-10 RECOMMENDED (dollars)

<u>Program</u>	<u>Total</u>		<u>Personal Service Regular (Annual Salaried)</u>	
	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Change</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Change</u>
Administration	786,000	19,000	786,000	19,000
Higher Education	0	(136,000)	0	(136,000)
Veteran Counseling Services Program	5,579,000	230,000	5,554,000	205,000
Total	6,365,000	113,000	6,340,000	88,000

<u>Program</u>	<u>Holiday/Overtime Pay (Annual Salaried)</u>	
	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Change</u>
Administration	0	0
Higher Education	0	0
Veteran Counseling Services Program	25,000	25,000
Total	25,000	25,000

VETERANS' AFFAIRS

**STATE OPERATIONS - GENERAL FUND
SUMMARY OF NONPERSONAL SERVICE AND MAINTENANCE UNDISTRIBUTED
APPROPRIATIONS AND CHANGES
2009-10 RECOMMENDED
(dollars)**

Program	Total		Supplies and Materials	
	Amount	Change	Amount	Change
Administration	155,000	0	11,000	0
Veteran Counseling Services Program	775,000	280,000	120,000	70,000
Total	<u>930,000</u>	<u>280,000</u>	<u>131,000</u>	<u>70,000</u>

Program	Travel		Contractual Services	
	Amount	Change	Amount	Change
Administration	16,000	0	97,000	0
Veteran Counseling Services Program	139,000	20,000	266,000	0
Total	<u>155,000</u>	<u>20,000</u>	<u>363,000</u>	<u>0</u>

Program	Equipment	
	Amount	Change
Administration	31,000	0
Veteran Counseling Services Program	250,000	190,000
Total	<u>281,000</u>	<u>190,000</u>

**STATE OPERATIONS - OTHER THAN GENERAL FUND
SUMMARY OF APPROPRIATIONS AND CHANGES
2009-10 RECOMMENDED
(dollars)**

Program	Total		Personal Service	
	Amount	Change	Amount	Change
Administration	0	(85,000)	0	(57,000)
Higher Education	1,966,000	85,000	1,161,000	57,000
Total	<u>1,966,000</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1,161,000</u>	<u>0</u>

Program	Nonpersonal Service	
	Amount	Change
Administration	0	(28,000)
Higher Education	805,000	28,000
Total	<u>805,000</u>	<u>0</u>

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

Fund Type	Available 2008-09	Recommended 2009-10	Change
General Fund	11,345,550	7,946,000	(3,399,550)
Special Revenue Funds - Federal	500,000	500,000	0
Total	<u>11,845,550</u>	<u>8,446,000</u>	<u>(3,399,550)</u>

VETERANS' AFFAIRS

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

<u>Program</u>	<u>Available 2008-09</u>	<u>Recommended 2009-10</u>	<u>Change</u>
Administration			
General Fund	2,373,820	799,000	(1,574,820)
Blind Veteran Annuity Assistance			
General Fund	5,622,014	5,720,000	97,986
Veteran Counseling Services Program			
General Fund	906,516	1,427,000	520,484
Special Revenue Funds - Federal	500,000	500,000	0
Community Projects			
General Fund	2,443,200	0	(2,443,200)
Total	<u>11,845,550</u>	<u>8,446,000</u>	<u>(3,399,550)</u>