

Talking Points: CVSO Funding Legislation

- Counties help provide a vast array of services to American residents, including millions of veterans and their families. These services include employment training, housing assistance and substance abuse treatments.
- In 35 states, counties employ county veterans services officers (CVSOs) to assist veterans in filing for and appealing veterans benefit claims with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and to otherwise act as advocates for veterans in our communities. CVSOs provide assistance on a range of benefits, including service-connected benefits, enrollment in VA health care, VA home loans, education benefits, and available job placement assistance. Veterans are not always aware of the benefits available to them, and CVSOs are often the first to inform them about their eligibility.
 - In fact, a majority of claims filed with the VA originate with a county veteran service officer.
 - CVSOs live in the communities they serve and are deeply familiar with the needs of local veterans. Often, they are able to connect local veterans not only to federal and state benefits, but to local resources as well. CVSOs are a particularly vital resource for otherwise underserved veterans, especially for those living in rural parts of the country.
 - Due to their extensive training and accreditation, CVSOs avoid many of the common administrative and technical mistakes that are often the root cause of delays for claims.
- However, many counties face strict budgetary constraints. For example, 45 states place limits on county property tax authority and only 29 states allow for collection of local sales taxes – the main general revenue sources for most of America’s counties.
 - As a result of these financial limitations, CVSOs often do not receive the resources needed to ensure all eligible veterans are effectively able to navigate the complex network of veterans benefits and services, or to conduct the outreach necessary to ensure all our veterans are adequately informed about which benefits they have earned.
- The draft bill from Senator Baldwin, which is currently in the works (but has not yet been introduced), would allow the Secretary of the VA to enter into contracts with state Departments of Veterans Affairs to allow states to create, expand, or support CVSOs and their outreach.
 - The bill would authorize \$25 million annually for three years to expand and support CVSOs, who already assist veterans in obtaining billions of dollars in benefits annually. States would be required to submit an application containing a three-year plan for the use of these funds, and the Secretary would develop guidance for outcome measures to determine the effectiveness of the programs or hires.
- Federal funding to support our CVSOs would enable states and counties to hire new CVSOs, provide training for CVSOs, enhance outreach activities to veterans through existing CVSOs, and/or help establish county veterans service offices where they do not yet exist. This will result in more veterans being connected to the VA, and in turn, increased benefits receipts to local veterans.