

CLAYTON COUNTY VETERANS AFFAIRS MEETING

600 Gunder Road NE, Elkader, Iowa 52043

February 10, 2025, at 7:30 a.m.

The Veterans Commission Meeting was called to order at 7:30 a.m. on February 10, 2025, at the Clayton County Office Building Meeting Room.

I.) Roll Call: Commissioners Eilers, Torkelson and Jordan, Director, present.

II.) Approval of Minutes: Motion was made by Eilers to approve the minutes from the December 8, 2024, meeting, seconded by Torkelson. Motion carried unanimously. There was no meeting in January as the Board of Supervisors was reviewing and accepting applications for the commissioner position and conducting a discussion about the Commission expansion to include additional Commission positions.

III.) Public Comments: None.

IV.) Budget Review: Jordan distributed the current Fiscal Budget for Period Ending: January 31, 2025. The Veterans Affairs office spent \$4,658.72 during the month of January 2025. A total of 64.21% remains in the budget for the year. Jordan reviewed new expenses incurring this month to include items to be distributed at the Clayton County Fair in August 2025 advertising veteran services available at the VA Office. These items include sunshades, baseballs, and pens. He also indicated that funds were spent on obtaining sympathy cards to be sent to families upon a veteran's death. Eilers made the motion to approve the budget, Torkelson seconded the motion; the motion carried unanimously.

V.) Old Business:

Jordan stated that he was continuing collaborative outreach opportunities with Crawford and Grant Counties in Wisconsin. Two plans were reviewed. Plan A: An event for veterans at Prairie Fun Land in Prairie du Chien, and Plan B: Working with employees and guests during May 2025 military appreciation month at Cabella's in Prairie du Chien. These types of activities will depend on the DEI and federal government approval.

VI.) New Business:

- a). Following the President's executive order, the VA issued a memorandum clarifying the particulars of the hiring freeze. VA positions that are exempt from the freeze are mostly clinician positions, as these were deemed positions that are critical to Veteran care. Employment offers that were extended with a start date of February 8, 2025, will be honored.
- b). New business hours for the county offices were discussed. Jordan informed the Commission that the new hours are from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. starting February 18, 2025.
- c). The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs' Spring Training is on March 18, 2025, from 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. via virtual training.
- d). One of the van drivers requested mileage from home to Garnavillo where the van is stored. Jordan indicated that the budget was set for the current year and there were no monies budgeted to cover this cost. The van drivers are reminded that this is a volunteer-ship role. We have four drivers in this role. Discussion was held regarding the current stipend. Jordan said he would check with the surrounding areas including Allamakee, Dubuque, Fayette and Buchanan Counties to obtain information regarding driver stipends.
- e) One of the drivers was concerned about the safety of the tires on the van. Eilers will contact the DAV Travel Office and speak to Melissa regarding the replacement of tires. A decision will be made between the County and DAV Travel Office pertaining to this concern. If replacement occurs, the DAV Credit Card will be used.

f). The December Statistical Report was distributed. 40 total calls were received this month re: Veteran related concerns. 12 total office visits from Veterans were completed, 4 home visits were completed, 0 outreach events were conducted, and 2 training events occurred. The January Statistical Report was distributed 34 total calls were received this month re: Veteran related concerns. 17 total office visits from Veterans were completed, 2 home visits were completed, 0 outreach events were conducted, and 1 training event occurred.

g). Publication of VA benefit rates for calendar year 2025 were received. IDVA issue semi-annual per diem rates for Iowa Veterans Homes that will become effective March 1, 2025, were also received.

h). The VA adds several cancers as presumptive conditions for service connection. On January 8, 2025, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced the following cancer conditions as presumptive for service connection: acute and chronic leukemias, multiple myelomas, myelodysplastic syndromes, myelofibrosis, urinary bladder, ureter, and related genitourinary cancer. These conditions are specific to Gulf War Veterans and Post 9/11 Veterans deployed or serving in certain theaters of operation.

VII. Review and approval of Claims:

VIII. Confirmation of the Next Meeting: Next meeting will be on March 10, 2025, at 7:30 a.m.

IX. Adjournment: Eilers made the motion to adjourn, Torkelson seconded the motion; Motion unanimously carried. The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted by Gerrie Torkelson

February Report

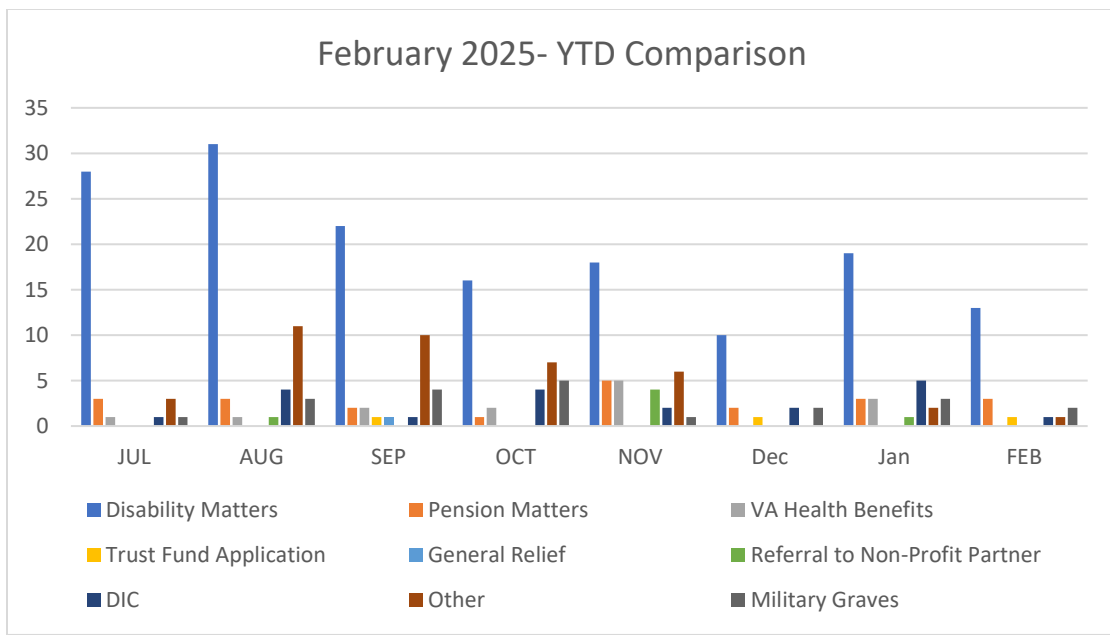
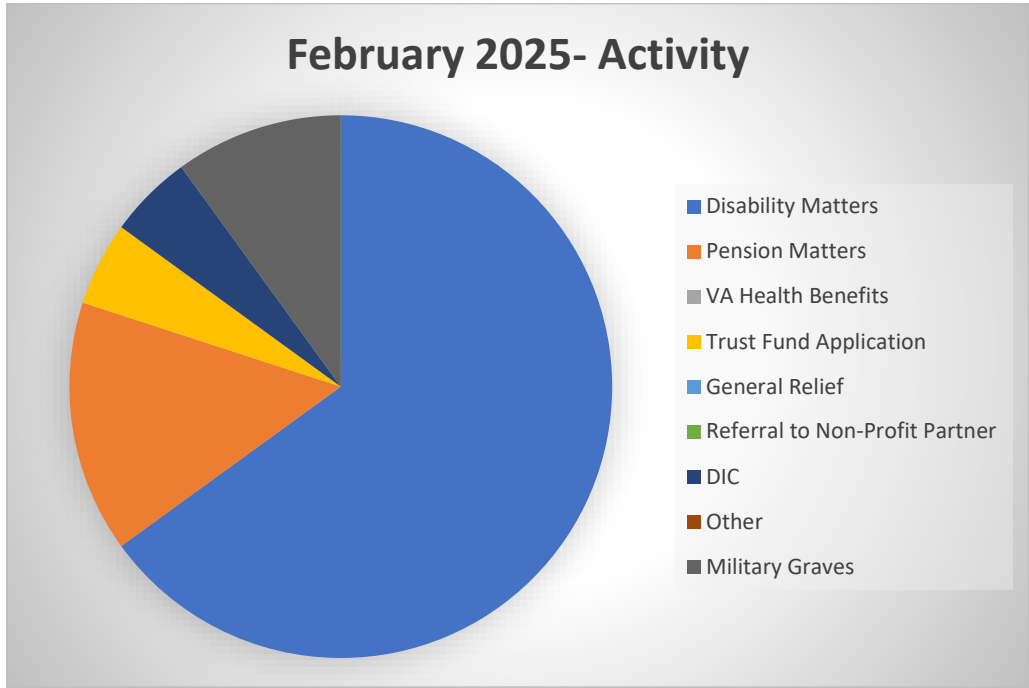
24 total number of calls received this month re: Veteran related concerns.

11 total office visits from Veterans.

2 home visits

0 outreach events

1 training events



VA & State Updates:

Tricare Issues

Since the beginning of the year, military families have reported challenges in accessing medical care resulting from the new contract with Tri West Healthcare Alliance. Tri West assumed the contract on January 1, 2024; however, there have been reports that the transition has impacted beneficiaries' ability to access health care services. Among the issues have been difficulty with getting appointments with specialists; prolonged wait times with members services, issues with online portal, and interruption in coverage. TriWest have been working to resolve the issues. The Defense Health Agency has acknowledged the issues and is working with TriWest to address the concerns.

Tax Season Guidance for Veterans

VA Benefits: Veterans should note that VA disability benefits, inclusive for VA pension, VR&E benefits, educational benefits (i.e. GI Bill) are not considered taxable income. Veterans may qualify for a federal tax refund if their VA disability percentage increased, including retroactive adjustments.

IRS Free Filing: Veterans with an adjustment gross income of \$79,000 or less can file electronically using an IRS Free File software provider. Veterans with high income can use Free File fillable forms.

[In-Person Help](#): Veterans with an adjustment income of \$64,000 or less, veterans with disabilities, or Veterans age 60 or older can receive free in-person assistance from an IRS certified volunteer.

VA Benefits & White House Funding Freeze Order

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, veteran Benefits and support services will not be affected by White House's freeze on federal financial programs. VA services are inclusive of education support, suicide prevention programs, and homeless assistance. VA Secretary has confirmed that the financial halt will not disrupt health care or veteran benefits. The Office of Management and Budget called for a pause on federal financial assistance disbursements to ensure that funds were not linked to diversity and inclusion programs.