



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 335, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101-2470

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: September 27, 2022

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

PRIORITIZING OUR VETERANS: ESTABLISHING A CENTER FOR MILITARY AND VETERAN REINTEGRATION IN EAST COUNTY (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

San Diego County has the largest concentration of military personnel in the world with 120,000 active-duty personnel, and almost 250,000 veterans, according to the California Association of County Veterans Service Officers. The majority of our active-duty service members are split roughly evenly between the Navy and the Marine Corps, serving among our eight military bases in the County. The military is directly and indirectly responsible for 340,000 jobs in the County, which makes up almost 10 percent of the total local civilian labor force. Our region's history is closely linked to the military; however, this connection extends beyond active-duty service, resulting in military personnel and veterans collectively accounting for approximately 35 percent of the entire San Diego County population. The regional economy and community are linked to both the military's presence and our ever-growing veteran population.

Through government agencies and public and private veteran support organizations, our region's veterans have a vast range of assistance programs available to them. Many of these services directly address primary barriers to veteran employment, through technical skill development and job placement, and by addressing broader issues of psychological and cultural reintegration into both the work world and private civilian life. Several local organizations assist in housing and resource navigation, education, behavioral health services and specialized counseling.

The U.S Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is responsible for providing benefits such as health care and other services to military veterans after they leave the service. Additionally, the County of San Diego has made it a priority to serve our veterans through initiatives such as our Vet-Connect Program, the Veteran Service Representative (VSR) Outreach Program, participation in the CalVet Transition Assistance Program (CalTap), supplementary transition assistance program, outreach activities through our Live Well on Wheels vehicles, self-sufficiency service enrollment, and increasing the hiring of veterans in the County. In addition, the County currently offers services at our four County-operated Offices of Military and Veteran Affairs (OMVA) and

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Military and Veterans Resource Centers (MVRCs) in the South, Central, North Inland, and North Coastal regions of the County, which provide benefit information, assistance, and other support to San Diego County veterans and their families.

San Diego's respect for veterans and unwavering patriotism are a significant part of the lifeblood of the region. East County is home to the largest number of military veterans in our region, with 57,455 veterans spread throughout incorporated cities and rural communities. However, District 2 is the only Supervisorial District that does not have a County-operated MVRC, despite having the largest number of veterans residing there.

Several veterans and veteran organizations have pointed out that individuals exiting the military can experience difficulty and confusion when attempting to identify and navigate the resources that they need or desire. The Center for Military and Veteran Reintegration (CMVR) is a recognized national model for helping veterans smoothly transition from the service. CMVRs serve as a one-stop shop and hub for service members, veterans, and their spouses, to successfully prepare them for civilian life. Designed to be a model pursuant to the *Navy Seal Chief Petty Officer William "Bill" Mulder Transition Improvement Act of 2021*, CMVRs assist veterans and their families in successfully reintegrating into local communities via coordinated and integrated services under one roof. These include services such as education and employment assistance, entrepreneurship, wellness, home ownership, and financial assistance.

The County should evaluate our current approach and consider offering services provided through the CMVR model. We can also consider providing innovative, intergenerational additions such as a recreation and community center with programming, senior services, a co-working space, behavioral health services, and telemedicine. A CMVR can streamline military and veterans organizations' efforts, consolidate organizations into a one-stop shop, and offer an expanded array of resources for veterans. We recommend evaluating the CMVR model for a location in East County which will provide a great opportunity to study a new approach to serving our veterans, as well as bringing these services to an underserved area of the County.

Today's action seeks to bring a veterans resource center to East County, and to evaluate current gaps and barriers in services of our existing County-operated MVRCs, through a pilot at the Central Region MVRC. This action will reimagine and improve MVRCs to expand services, explore adopting and shifting to a CMVR model at every County-operated MVRC, investigate ways to increase collaboration, and streamline efforts of government agencies and other private and public organizations that exist to serve veterans. It will also establish stronger partnerships with military leadership and spread awareness of these facilities, allowing County veteran resource centers to be recognized as the main reintegration centers when military personnel exit the service.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

SUPERVISOR JOEL ANDERSON AND CHAIR NATHAN FLETCHER

1. In accordance with Section 401, Article XXIII of the County Administrative Code authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting to issue a Competitive Solicitation for consultant services specializing in veterans wellness and services to explore the feasibility for the implementation of the Center for Military and Veteran

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Reintegration (CMVR) model and expanded and novel services at existing County Military and Veteran Resource Centers (MVRCs), as well as the establishing of an East County Veterans Center, and upon successful negotiations and determination of a fair and reasonable price, award contracts for a term of one year, with one option year and up to an additional six months if needed, and to amend the contracts as needed to reflect changes to services and funding.

2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to identify potential sites and existing County facilities within the County's Second Supervisorial District to establish a reimagined CMVR, with associated veterans housing, and to return with an implementation plan in one year for consideration.
3. Direct the CAO to take the steps necessary to implement a pilot program to reimagine veterans services and centers in a new East County facility as well as the Central MVRC through expanded and improved services, with future plans of expansion to all other County MVRCs.
4. Direct the CAO to foster partnerships, actively seek funding for program implementation, and to work with the California Department of Veterans Affairs, local military leadership, and state and federal agencies to establish recognition of County-operated veterans service facilities to improve awareness efforts and institute County MVRCs as primary hubs of services for military personnel transitioning to civilian life.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Our military members are willing to pay the ultimate sacrifice to keep us safe. It is our responsibility to take care of our veterans, almost half of whom are people of color, including assisting with challenges associated with transitioning from military service to civilian life. Assistance can be provided to develop transferable skill sets, provide healthcare supports, be successful as a civilian, and more. Today's action seeks to expand services and create more accessible resources for vulnerable populations of veterans leaving the service, such as enhanced assistance for job training and navigation, social and emotional support, and housing navigation and financial assistance. This support is expected to increase employment opportunities and the wellbeing of this underserved population.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Approval of this action correlates to the County of San Diego's sustainability goals by improving the health and wellbeing of our veterans who often need specialized services. This action also focuses on collaboration with existing veterans organizations and community partners to increase and streamline equitable access to services for our underserved veteran populations.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funds for Recommendation 1 are included in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022-23 Operation Plan in the Health and Human Services Agency (HHS). If approved, this request will result in costs and revenue of approximately \$100,000 in FY 2022-23, for the hiring of a consultant to conduct the assessment as outlined in Recommendation 1. The funding source is existing General Purpose

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Revenue currently allocated to Health and Human Services Agency (HHS). At this time, there will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

There may be future fiscal impacts based on recommendations from today's action, including Recommendations 2 and 3. It is estimated that the costs for the Department of General Services to conduct the property search, due diligence, and planning activities would be approximately \$550,000. Funding for these costs and any associated future costs will need to be identified by the HHS and will proceed once identified.

Recommendations for future costs would return back for consideration and approval by the Board as needed. The department will monitor its budget and return to the Board with mid-year action to adjust the budget as necessary and/or incorporate future budgets as funding becomes available.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

The recommended actions will positively impact businesses by expanding opportunities for job navigation and training for veterans, as well as services related to entrepreneurship and associated technical operational assistance. These efforts will help to grow the workforce in various trades and fields and stimulate the local economy through commerce and the creation of jobs.

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

San Diego County is home to the second largest population of military veterans in California. The County's Office of Military and Veterans Affairs (OMVA) currently operates four Military and Veteran Resource Centers (MVRCs) to assist veterans in obtaining vital services upon leaving the military and transitioning to civilian life. These centers provide professional services for military veterans, their dependents and survivors who are entitled to benefits from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, the State of California, and other agencies. The centers assist veterans and their families in obtaining benefits and educating them on the benefits programs they are eligible to receive.

Currently, assistance provided through the centers includes services for employment, home loans, benefits, and health care services through non-profit organizations and accredited County Veteran Services Representatives. Our veterans served our country, and it should be our role and responsibility to find ways to support and serve them once they have transitioned out of military service. The County already serves an important role, but it is our hope that we can identify additional strategies to help our veterans enjoy a meaningful and successful life in San Diego County.

There is currently a County-operated center in each supervisorial district, except for District 2, despite East County being home to the largest number of veterans in the region. We are asking that the County move forward to establish a reimagined veteran facility for District 2 and explore potential veteran housing opportunities in association with the new center, either on site or adjacent to the facility. The regional housing shortage has significantly affected veterans, particularly those

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who have retired and live on a fixed income. The County is committed to sustainable housing opportunities, particularly for our vulnerable seniors, low-income families, disabled individuals and our veterans. This action would cite a County-operated East County veterans resource center, with consideration of a housing component.

The Center for Military and Veterans Reintegration (CMVR) is a nationally recognized model that provides peer supported, self-directed options for veterans, such as job coaching and counseling, navigation of auto and homeowners' insurance, home loans and financing, and other support services for veterans and their families. The CMVR model aims for a more in-house, concierge-style approach, with all veterans organizations under one roof, providing a "one -stop shop" for veterans.

Feedback from veterans organizations, veterans and their families indicate there is room to expand upon the County of San Diego-operated centers, including the potential to shift to the CMVR model at existing locations and a new District 2 site. Today's action recommends the authorizing of a procurement for consultant services to help assess our current offerings. This action also asks to identify ways to expand services and evaluate the CMVR model and potential implementation. This will help us better understand the demographics of our veterans and their communities, identify improvements that veterans would like to see in services and opportunities offered, and help address the challenges they have in obtaining services and experiencing a sense of community upon entering civilian life.

Capturing income levels and occupations, where veterans reside, what services they utilized upon exiting the military and current services they utilize - including OMVA and MVRC services - can help to identify pathways to improvements. Regionally surveying military and veteran residents and their families on what they would like to have in an ideal resource center, as well as their experiences and use of services upon transitioning out of the military, will also help form recommendations. It is also important to engage stakeholders, local military leadership, and the appropriate state and federal agencies, to gain insight on current processes and ways the County can improve services, seek funding, and to improve awareness efforts, gain recognition and help institute our centers as primary hubs of services upon active-duty transitioning.

The report back should identify the differences in services at County-operated MVRCs, in comparison to a CMVR, including existing services that are not being utilized, underutilized, or could be replaced, and provide recommendations to improve the facilities. Further, streamlining efforts of existing organizations that assist military and veterans and their families by evaluating ways to collaborate and to be integrated at MVRCs, should be explored.

The County could expand our services and partner organizations as well as consider other innovative services that could feasibly be expanded or added to our veteran resource centers. These may include recreational opportunities, veteran specific programming and sports opportunities, job training, housing navigation, senior veteran services, telemedicine assistance, connections and referrals for family members, or co-working settings for veteran businesses with onsite operational assistance. The services could be district-specific and individualized according to the needs of each district's veteran population. Providing new intergenerational, expanded, and ongoing services to

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our veterans would help support smoother transitions out of the military and help to facilitate a greater sense of community and conduit of ongoing support for veterans and their families.

Today's action asks for a reimagined approach to veterans centers in San Diego County by exploring the CMVR model and citing a new facility to serve veterans in the Second Supervisorial District. Through this effort, we can enhance and expand services and streamline collaboration of existing resources that the County and non-profits provide and ensure that veterans have what they want and need in one place. We can add a new array of services for veterans and family members of all ages. By establishing a District 2 facility, the County should also assess ways to improve existing centers in all supervisorial districts, based on anticipated feedback from stakeholders and a consultant that specializes in veterans wellness and services.

It is important that we invest in resources that are meaningful to our veterans and ensure that there is equitable access for this population throughout the County. Having a one-stop shop with streamlined and effective integrated services and opportunities is vital for their successful transition to civilian life.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's action supports the Community and Equity Strategic Initiatives in the County of San Diego's 2022-27 Strategic Plan by expanding veteran facilities as a "one-stop shop," including the creation of opportunities for economic growth and a sense of community for vulnerable individuals in San Diego County.

Respectfully submitted,



JOEL ANDERSON
Supervisor, Second District



CHAIR NATHAN FLETCHER
Supervisor, Fourth District

ATTACHMENT(S)

N/A