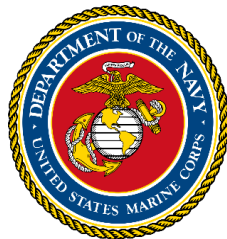
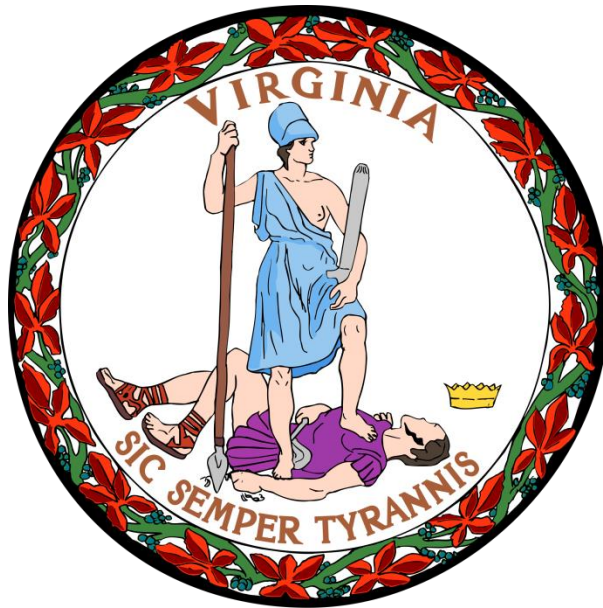


Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs Year in Review and Virginia Military Advisory Council 2018 Annual Report



Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs
January 2019

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Preface: The Virginia Military Advisory Council was created by the Code of Virginia through §2.2-2666.1. The legislation requires an annual executive summary of interim activity and work of the Council to be submitted to the Governor and General Assembly.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Veterans and Defense Affairs Secretariat has two main missions: first, to provide active outreach to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the veterans service organizations, and the veterans community in Virginia to support and assist Virginia's veterans in identifying and obtaining the services, assistance, and support to which they are entitled; and secondly, to provide active outreach to the U.S. Department of Defense to support the military installations and neighboring communities in the Commonwealth.

The Virginia Military Advisory Council (VMAC) was created as an advisory council to: maintain a cooperative and constructive relationship between the Commonwealth and the leadership of the Armed Forces of the United States and the military commanders of such Armed Forces stationed in the Commonwealth, encourage regular communication on continued military facility viability, and encourage the exploration of privatization opportunities and issues affecting preparedness, public safety, and security.

In 2018, the Secretariat, under the leadership of Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs Carlos L. Hopkins, continued to address the needs of the more than 725,000 veterans and 115,000 active duty and reserve members of the military in Virginia. This was accomplished by taking a number of steps to ensure veterans and service members were connected to employment and other services, easing transitions to new posts or to civilian life, and providing resources to prevent suicide.

Under the leadership of the Secretary, the focus of the VMAC in 2018 was on continuing efforts to make the Commonwealth of Virginia the most military-friendly state in the Nation. This was accomplished by addressing the needs identified by the military service chiefs and the base and installation commanders in the areas of public-public partnerships support for military children, and growing the military mission in Virginia.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

The Commonwealth is continuing to integrate veterans and transitioning service members into the Virginia workforce through the Virginia Values Veterans (V3) and the Military Medics and Corpsmen (MMAC) Programs. These two programs, both of which were “First in the Nation” concepts, had significant changes in 2018. Through the V3 Program, Virginia employers hired more than 8,500 veterans. In 2018, the MMAC program was made permanent, which resulted in tripling the number of partner health care systems providing employment opportunities. Both of these programs, as well as the work with the military installation Transition Offices, are a clear indication of the importance of providing meaningful careers for those who have served our Nation.

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In addition, we have initiated a program dedicated to help veterans develop the skills and identify the resources they need to become or continue as successful business owners. The Virginia Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Coordinator began working in the Fall 2018.

Our focus on employment includes ensuring that our military spouses find quality employment while they live in Virginia. Military spouse employment is important to the overall well-being of a military family and, thus, overall military readiness. One example is legislation passed in 2018 ensuring that Virginia will recognize the teaching licenses of military spouses who are teachers and were licensed by other states.

The Secretariat is also working with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Hiring our Heroes, which launched Military Spouse Economic Empowerment Zones (MSEEZ) throughout the Nation. We are working with the Hampton Roads Chamber and other local entities to ensure military spouses find quality employment and can care for their families.

Another military family quality of life issue addressed in 2018 is the passage of legislation in allowing students living in military housing to have open enrollment at local schools. This legislation was a priority for the Virginia Military Advisory Council.

Virginia was selected to be in the First Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Military Service Members, Veterans, and their Families, hosted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. This challenge, co-led by the Virginia Secretaries of Veterans and Defense Affairs and Health and Human Resources, will be joining six other states to implement the Veterans Administration's 2018-2028 National Strategy for the Prevention of Veteran Suicide.

Since Virginia is home to about 104,000 women veterans – the largest percentage of any state in the Nation – Virginia is prioritizing services for women veterans. The largest step taken this year was funding for a Women Veterans Coordinator. The coordinator is responsible for developing programs and services for women veterans in the Commonwealth, organizing the annual Women Veterans Summit, and coordinating with the Veterans Administration's Center for Women Veterans.

In order to provide greater integration and communication between the reserve and active military communities in the Commonwealth, Governor Northam transferred oversight of the Department of Military Affairs, which includes the Virginia National Guard, to the Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs.

This year, Virginia opened its 31st state veteran's benefits office at the Pentagon. This office will help the thousands of Virginia veterans and their families who work at the United States Department of Defense headquarters identify and receive state and federal benefits. Last fiscal year, Virginia's Veterans Service Representatives helped veterans across the Commonwealth file over 71,000 claims resulting in more than \$3.2 Billion dollars being put into veterans' pockets.

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Virginia also supported state veterans cemeteries, including a significant expansion of the Albert G. Horton Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery in Suffolk, Virginia. This expansion, funded by a \$10.2 Million federal grant from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), is the largest single cemetery expansion grant the VA has ever awarded.

Virginia Military Advisory Council (VMAC)

The 2018 VMAC met three times during the year; however, a significant amount of additional work by staff, working with the military communities, was conducted throughout the year. In addition to the meetings, the Governor hosted a holiday reception for all military leaders at the Executive Mansion. During each VMAC meeting, Commanders were briefed on current DoD budget and other Congressional activity impacting Virginia defense establishments, as well as updates on efforts underway to “grow the military mission in Virginia.”

Governor Northam and the First Lady of Virginia, Mrs. Pam Northam, attended the first VMAC meeting of this administration. This provided an opportunity for the Governor to meet with the Commanders of Virginia installations and bases, and hear remarks from the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Energy, Installations, and Environment. The comments from the Assistant Secretary focused on the need for the bases and installations to work on public-public partnerships or Intergovernmental Support Agreements (IGSA) with communities to provide more affordable services thus reducing federal expenditures.

Providing support to transitioning service members and their families continued to be an area of emphasis during the VMAC meetings. The Virginia Department of Veterans Services (DVS) provided updates on the many programs for which they are responsible. These updates included a joint presentation with the President of the Virginia Chamber of Commerce on Blue Print Virginia. The Chamber is working closely with Virginia businesses to increase the number of veterans hired in the Commonwealth. During the November VMAC meeting, Commanders conducted a work session, facilitated by DVS, to identify specific areas where the Commonwealth can support Virginia’s service members with careers after they leave the service.

Another major accomplishment during the VMAC meetings was the creation of an initial list of potential infrastructure projects that, if funded, would provide greater value to the military communities and enhance the readiness or quality of life for service members and their families. The list was created, in part, to identify potential projects to be funded if Congress appropriates funds to address language in the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act. In addition, several of the projects could be considered for potential state grant funding, if the Virginia General Assembly authorized such a program. Several states across the Nation are implementing and funding projects to enhance the “military value” of their installations in a demonstration of support for what are considered critical state assets.

Listed below are examples of actions taken in 2018 in support of individual bases and installations:

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- 📦 Worked with the Virginia Congressional delegation and Pentagon leadership on the funding necessary for a Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility (SCIF) at the National Ground Intelligence Center at Rivanna Station.
- 📦 Worked with Joint Base Langley-Eustis and Navy at Wallops Island on energy resiliency.
- 📦 Worked with Fort Belvoir to establish an additional Veterans Services Benefits Office on the installation.
- 📦 Worked with several installations and military communities on creating public-public partnerships.

Conclusion

Over the past year, the Office of the Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs focused most of its efforts on supporting the many service members who are transitioning out of the military and seeking civilian employment in the Commonwealth. The VMAC continues to foster a collaborative working environment with military leadership, the Office of the Governor, and the Commonwealth. Over the years, the benefits to the military community have increased and the military community's contribution to the Commonwealth have remained extremely valuable. As potential future cuts to the Department of Defense may negatively impact the state, it is critical to maintain this valuable line of communication and cooperation with military leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia.