



Department of Veterans Affairs

Testimony of Commissioner Thomas J. Saadi Appropriations Committee February 21, 2023

Senator Marx, Representative Dillon, Senator Somers, Representative Foncello and esteemed members of the Appropriations Health Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony and appear before you to speak about the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) and the Governor's proposed budget.

The mission of the DVA is "Serving Those Who Served" and with those four words comes a great responsibility, as it is only because of those who served and those who continue to serve in our armed forces that we are able to live in this free and democratic nation. I thank our Veterans and current Service members across our state and nation for their service and sacrifice.

At the DVA, we continue to update programs, procedures and facilities to improve our delivery of long-term skilled nursing care, residential and rehabilitative services, benefits advocacy and assistance, and cemetery and memorial services to our Veterans and Service members. We have accomplished this in challenging times and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic due to the hard work of the DVA staff, a great partnership with the Federal VA and support from other state agencies including the CT National Guard.

Since I testified before this committee in 2021 on the fiscal years 2022 and 2023 budget, the DVA successfully completed extensive quality of life renovations and improvements to all the Veterans' rooms in the Residential Facility and repairs and repainting were completed throughout the facility. We established a new creative arts work room, installed new computers in the Veteran computer and game room, and initiated renovations to the Veterans library. The DVA also installed new outdoor recreational pavilions at the Residential Facility and the Healthcare Center. These projects were accomplished through well planned targeted use of donation funds. The DVA has also implemented operational and policy updates to make the admissions process to our Healthcare Center (HCC) skilled nursing facility more efficient through coordination between DVA staff and the Department of Social Services (DSS) in the tracking of Medicaid applications and with actively engaging family or persons assisting Veterans to facilitate the application process.

The DVA continues its Energy Efficiency Program which will, among other things, help to stabilize utility costs and includes updated lighting controls, new refrigeration in the main kitchen, and transition to LED and solar lighting as appropriate.

We continue to expand partnerships with federal, state and local agencies and non-profits as well as with our statewide Veteran Service Organizations to pool resources, coordinate efforts and expand supportive services for Veterans. Several of these organizations have located to our renovated Veteran Resources Service Center at our Campus, moving towards the goal of making the Campus a one-stop service hub for Veterans. These types of partnerships, including that with Easterseals Veterans Rally Point, have provided for expanded services to DVA Veterans and community-based Veterans with no additional cost to the State.

The Governor's proposed biennium budget enables the DVA to continue improving our service delivery through fiscal years 2024 and 2025, with continued structural adjustments to expenditures from the DVA Institutional General Welfare fund.

I thank you for your time and your service to our state and I am glad to respond to any questions.