



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
287 West Street
Rocky Hill, Connecticut 06067



Ronald P. Welch
Commissioner
Brigadier General U.S. Army (Ret)

Testimony to Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Subcommittee
Commissioner Ronald P. Welch
March 25, 2025

Good afternoon, Finance, Revenue and Bonding Subcommittee Co-Chairs Senator Patricia Billie Miller and Representative Ron Napoli, Ranking Members Senator Tony Hwang and Representative John Piscopo, committee members of the Bonding Subcommittee, members of the public, and always my fellow Connecticut Veterans and their families.

It is my honor today to represent the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs (CT DVA), its resident Veterans, dedicated staff, volunteers, visitors and Veteran support organizations, both state and non-profit entities. It is further my honor to represent the more than 146,000 Veterans statewide along with their families and communities who utilize and support the CT DVA's operations at its main campus, three Veterans cemeteries, and five satellite locations located in each of the five U.S. congressional districts.

My purpose today is to thank you for considering Governor Lamont's proposed bonding authorizations for the CT DVA and to update you on the current bond authorization status. I urge you to support Governor Lamont's proposed Fiscal Year 26-27 Bonding Proposal. The CT DVA operates and maintains a main campus of more than 39 buildings, 800,000 square feet of facilities, 2.5 miles of roadway, 1.5 miles of operational tunnels, on 92 acres in Rocky Hill, CT. The CT DVA also operates and maintains three Veterans cemeteries, a closed cemetery in Darien, an active cemetery in Rocky Hill, and an active cemetery in Middletown, CT. In 2024 we are experiencing a rapidly growing Veteran census in our domicile and skilled nursing facility as well as in our Office of Advocacy and Assistance's claims processed. Our dedicated staff and volunteers ensure we are providing the best possible Veteran-centered care 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

First, the status of existing bond authorizations. The CT DVA through Governor Lamont and the State Bond Commission have nearly fully allocated all existing CT DVA bond authorizations. The only remaining authorization is specific to the CT DVA main boiler project, PA 11-57, 2(d)(1) with a remaining authorization of \$533,635. This amount was requested for allocation for the next appropriate State Bonding Committee meeting. The funding is necessary to continue operating a temporary back-up boiler for \$30,000 a month until the boiler installation project is complete at the main campus. The CT DVA appreciates the support in allocating our remaining bond authorization.

Governor Lamont's State Fiscal Year 26-27 Bonding Proposal for CT DVA is critical to the safe, efficient, and supportive operations of CT DVA infrastructure and property, and I urge you to support Governor Lamont's Bonding Proposal. The total of \$ 27,500,000 in state year 2026 and \$10,000,000 in state year 2027 represent 13 projects that primarily focus on life, safety and health priorities. The projects also represent phased approaches that the CT DVA uses to successfully partner with federal, state, and other entities for competitive grant support as applicable. My submitted testimony provides background information on each of the 13 projects. With respect to your time and very busy schedules I will forego a readout of the project backgrounds but have included a summary and update herein.

I appreciate the opportunity and honor to testify before you on a critical State Fiscal Year 26-27 infrastructure bonding program totaling \$37,500,000. This funding will support CT DVA's time-honored mission of Serving Those Who Served since 1864. My staff and I are prepared to answer any questions you have regarding our proposed future uses of these funds if approved or on current project efforts.

The following is an update on the 13 projects referenced:

1) Amount of Request: \$6,000,000

Project Name: Renovation of 300,000-gallon Water Tower

Project Phase: Construction

Current Status: Department of Administration Services, Division of Construction Services is the project manager. Design was awarded for this project and a design kick off meeting occurred on March 24, 2025. CT DVA requires these funds for the next phase of bidding construction upon completion of design. This project is for an imminent safety hazard to a water source and communications platform in current use. The Metropolitan District Commission, State Historic Preservation Office, Federal Aviation Administration, and independent structural engineer reports all stipulate corrective actions are necessary to mitigate an imminent hazardous situation. This project's aim is to provide a 10-year solution for water supply and a permanent solution to DESPP's communication critical infrastructure needs. The end state in more than 10 years is to connect buildings directly to municipal water services that are currently supplied with domestic and fire suppression water from this tower. The water tower will remain as a permanent communications platform and FAA air traffic navigational aid.

Federal Grant Potential: This project is not eligible for a U.S. VA State Home Construction Grant or other known grant source.

2) Amount of Request: \$6,500,000

Project Name: Building #5 Roof Repair by Replacement

Project Phase: Design and Construction

Current Status: CT DVA requires this funding for the repair by replacement of the building #5 roof. Multiple engineer studies point to total replacement. The roof is still necessary to protect the current state staff offices and state functions operating in the building. The CT DVA functions located in this building are medical records, personal protective equipment storage, healthcare supplies, donation goods, information technology office and storage, and decontamination room for healthcare equipment. Additionally, the building is the irreplaceable central utility point for IT, phone, power, and water to several areas on campus. The building level 1 of 5 is occupied on a full-time basis. Floors 2 through 5 are occupied as required.

Federal Grant Potential: This project is applicable to the U.S. VA State Home Construction Grant Program of up to 65% of eligible costs. Applications are due on the 15th of April annually. The state funds are required for grant approval by 1st of August annually.

3) Amount of Request: \$ 2,000,000

Project Name: Campuswide Paving Replacement

Project Phase: Design and Construction

Current Status: CT DVA requires funding to replace paved surfaces throughout its main campus. Throughout the main campus and at Colonel Raymond F. Gates Veterans Cemetery, the condition of the pavement is beyond minor maintenance repair. The current surfaces are unsafe and present an imminent hazard to Veterans, visitors, and staff vehicles, wheelchairs, and pedestrians circulating the campus.

Federal Grant Potential: This project is not eligible for a U.S. VA State Home Construction Grant or other known grant source.

4) Amount of Request: \$ 2,000,000

Project Name: Building #6 Central Boiler Condensate Repairs

Project Phase: Design and Construction

Current Status: CT DVA requires this funding to repair the condensate system for the current boiler and two new boilers currently being installed. The current project to install boilers was separated from the larger project to allow a more informed design of the condensate system repair. The condensate system is operating at near failure condition, creating a hazard and water waste of hundreds of gallons of water daily.

Federal Grant Potential: This project is applicable to the U.S. VA State Home Construction Grant Program of up to 65% of eligible costs. Applications are due on the 15th of April annually. The state funds are required for grant approval by 1st of August annually.

5) Amount of Request: \$ 2,000,000

Project Name: HCC Emergency Standby Generator Replacement

Project Phase: Design and Construction

Current Status: CT DVA requires this funding to upgrade the current 300kw generator to 700kw or to a capacity the final design requires. The original generator was designed for a chronic disease hospital use group. The current license of the facility as a skilled nursing facility requires all systems in the lived environment to receive back-up power supply. This became evident during Tropical Storm Isaias in 2020 when the facility was without power for an extended period. The power and fuel storage tanks were inadequate for supplying power to the facility. Eversource provided the back-up power by temporarily installing, operating, and maintaining a larger generator to keep the facility in operation.

Federal Grant Potential: This project is applicable to the U.S. VA State Home Construction Grant Program of up to 65% of eligible costs. Applications are due on the 15th of April annually. The state funds are required for grant approval by 1st of August annually.

6) Amount of Request: \$ 2,000,000

Project Name: Building #2 Freezer and Refrigerator Replacement

Project Phase: Design and Construction

Current Status: CT DVA requests these funds for the replacement of existing refrigerators and freezers in the Main Kitchen (MK). The current freezers and refrigerators are original equipment more than 80 years old. These units are in a failed state and now operate on domestic water for cooling, using approximately 6,000 to 8,000 gallons of water a day. This project will save this water consumption and electrical demand with installation of modern equipment. This project will also save operating expenses for electricity. This equipment stores food items that support the serving of approximately 50,000 meals quarterly for the complete Veteran census in the domicile and healthcare functional areas.

Federal Grant Potential: This project is applicable to the U.S. VA Construction Grant Program of up to 65% of eligible costs. Applications are due on the 15th of April annually. The state funds are required for grant approval by 1st of July annually. The CT DVA will pursue all possible grant opportunities. The state's utility companies have already contributed funds for the immediate repairs to these units.

7) Amount of Request: \$ 7,500,000

Project Name: Middletown State Veterans Cemetery Expansion or Establishment

Project Phase: Design and Construction

Current Status: CT DVA requests these funds for the expansion or establishment of a new state veterans cemetery. The current Middletown cemetery, which consists of approximately 26 acres, has no remaining available property. By fall of 2027, the burial option of inground cremated remains will be at capacity. This is one of three options the Federal VA requires a State Veterans Cemetery to provide. The other two are options are inground casketed remains and above ground columbarium. The Middletown State Veterans Cemetery receives federal grant funds that total more than \$400,000.00 annually in plot allowances. This revenue stream and the grants provided to State Veterans Cemeteries by the U.S. VA are in jeopardy if maintenance, appearance, and capacity are not maintained to U.S. VA standards.

Federal Grant Potential: This project is applicable to the U.S. VA State Cemetery Grant Program. This grant covers 100% of eligible costs. An upfront 10% state match and funding for any unique “state requirements” is required to be eligible for this funding. The U.S. VA State Cemetery Grant Program also requires sufficient buildable, suitable and feasible property for an expansion or establishment of a State Veterans Cemetery. Applications are due on the 1st of July annually. The state funds are required for grant approval by 15th of August annually.

8) Amount of Request: \$ 3,500,000

Project Name: Campuswide Electrical Upgrade

Project Phase: Design and Construction

Current Status: CT DVA requests these funds for the next phase of a campus electrical upgrade. The first phase upgraded the electrical feed from West Street into the campus, replacement of the main campus generator and switch gear. The second phase is in progress now and involves the installation of two boilers, solar panels, and replacement of 80-year-old electrical circuitry.

Federal Grant Potential: This project is applicable to the U.S. VA State Home Construction Grant Program of up to 65% of eligible costs. Applications are due on the 15th of April annually. The state funds are required for grant approval by 1st of August annually.

9) Amount of Request: \$ 750,000

Project Name: Building #6 Smokestack Repairs or Demolition

Project Phase: Design and Construction

Current Status: CT DVA requests these funds for the repairs or demolition of the smokestack at building #6. An independent engineer report recommends repairs or demolition. The smokestack leans and will not be needed for boiler operation after the current boiler installation is complete. The smokestack is part of the historic design fabric of the 85-year-old campus. If feasible, the first option is to repair it, followed by demolition if repair is not safe and permanent.

Federal Grant Potential: This project is not eligible for a U.S. VA State Home Construction Grant or other known grant source.

10) Amount of Request: \$ 1,500,000

Project Name: Building #50 Electrical Repairs and Upgrades

Project Phase: Design and Construction

Current Status: CT DVA requires this funding to repair and upgrade interior electrical services in building #50. The building electrical service backbone has the capacity to serve the interior space electrical loads. The interior distribution pathways are based on limited residential service circa 1950s. This building's current tenants are entities that provide statewide support for Veteran entrepreneurial and business, mental health, donation, temporary Veterans housing office, and State of Connecticut Bureau of Information Technology and Success (BITS). The building is also home base for several Veteran non-profit agencies such as State Headquarters and chapters for Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion Auxiliary, Forever in My Heart Foundation, Marine Corp League, Hispanic Veterans of America, Vietnam Veterans of America and CT APEX.

Federal Grant Potential: This project is not eligible for a U.S. VA State Home Construction Grant or other known grant source.

11) Amount of Request: \$ 2,000,000

Project Name: Campuswide HVAC Replacements

Project Phase: Design and Construction

Current Status: CT DVA requires funding to repair and upgrade by replacement dozens of split ductless heating and cooling units located throughout the main campus. These units are at least 20 years old with many being first generation of this type of ductless unit. New technology is more efficient in terms of lower energy consumption and heating/cooling BTU generation and operational controls. These systems will augment the current heating supplied from the central boilers, allowing for extended seasonal starts and stops, saving natural gas consumption.

Federal Grant Potential: This project is applicable to the U.S. VA State Home Construction Grant Program of up to 65% of eligible costs. Applications are due on the 15th of April annually. The state funds are required for grant approval by 1st of August annually. This project is not currently eligible for Lead by Example or utility funding grants or incentives.

12) Amount of Request: \$ 1,500,000

Project Name: Building #6 Replacement of Main Campus 1 Megawatt Generator Above Ground Fuel Tank

Project Phase: Design and Construction

Current Status: CT DVA requires funding for the replacement of the main campus fuel tank. The current tank is not compliant with numerous regulatory requirements. The tank represents a significant risk of failure and injury. The generator replacement project was completed but did not include in its scope the replacement of the above ground fuel tank.

Federal Grant Potential: This project is applicable to the U.S. VA State Home Construction Grant Program of up to 65% of eligible costs. Applications are due on the 15th of April annually. The state funds are required for grant approval by 1st of August annually.

13) Amount of Request: \$ 750,000

Project Name: Replacement of Sidewalks throughout the Main Campus

Project Phase: Design and Construction

Current Status: CT DVA requires funding to replace sidewalks throughout the main campus. The sidewalks are a mix of asphalt and concrete surfaces. The current state of the sidewalks renders them non-compliant with safety standards, ability to perform snow removal properly and are ADA imminent hazards. Due to the linear feet of sidewalks requiring replacement, project drawings and bid for construction funding is necessary.

Federal Grant Potential: This project is not eligible for a U.S. VA State Home Construction Grant or other known grant source.