

“Honor the Dead by Helping the Living”



**Department of Pennsylvania
Veterans of Foreign Wars
of the United States**

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STATE COMMANDER'S CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

As we prepare to enter the most joyous and spiritual season of the year, let's take a moment to remember who we are and why we are important. As members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars organization, we have endured the dangers and hardships of military life – shared a foxhole, froze on the 38th parallel, endured monsoon season, and baked in the hot, sandy desert.

When we each raised our right hand and recited that solemn oath to join, there was most likely a family member(s) at home supporting each of us. And through our continued efforts with the VFW, we continue to honor and serve veterans, military, families, and communities. We will never forget the freedoms we fought to preserve.

Please reach out to your post and district member during this Holiday Season and do a buddy check. Some of your members may have a hard time during this season and could use a simple phone call to show them that you care about them, their wellbeing and membership.

May the spirit of the holidays fill your home with love and peace. I wish you all a joyful holiday season. May you find time to laugh, time to relax, and time to cherish being with those you hold dear.

Merry Christmas and prosperity in the New Year!

STATE VFW POST OFFICER TRAINING SESSIONS

Training for Post Service Officers will take place at the Mid-Winter Conference on January 18, 2024, at the Double Tree Hotel, Cranberry Twp. PA. The instructions will include the duties of the Post Service Officer and instructions on the PACT Act. Please make every effort to attend this informational class.

DISABILITY INCREASE

VA Disability rates for the year 2024 were confirmed on October 12, 2023, with the implementation of the Social Security Administration announced a 3.2% cost of living increase that will be applied to VA Disability Payments. The increase for all Disability Increases will begin 1 January 2024.

HOLIDAY SEASON- BUDDY CHECK

It is that time of year again and during the Holiday Season/Winter season we see an increase rate of suicide. Many veterans have lost family and friends that leave a large void in their daily lives.

When this happens, depression will begin to set in, and we need to ensure that we identify these veterans and establish an effective Buddy Check system to show them that Veterans take care of Veterans and their families. Refer these individuals to the VA Health Care System (Mental Health) where there are qualified professionals that can and will help.(Dial 988 then press 1) This will connect the individual to a qualified to the Mental Crisis Hot Line. Sometimes all it takes is someone to listen and let them know you care.

SUCIDE PREVENTION

Veterans Crisis Line:

Veterans, family members, and care providers can initiate a free and confidential conversation with an experienced and caring VA responder by calling the Veterans Crisis Line or. If you are concerned about the safety and well-being of a Veteran dial 988 for immediate assistance for suicide & crisis lifeline. Chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat to get support anonymously. A text message can be sent to 838255 to connect to a VA responder or call 800-273-8255 and Press 1. These resources can be used even if a Veteran is not registered with VA or enrolled in VA health care.

Make the Connection:

For Veterans who are not in immediate crisis, there are many treatment options and resources available. One universal resource is the Make the Connection website (**www.MakeTheConnection.net**) which provides a way for Veterans to privately explore mental health issues and difficult life experiences. You can read the stories and experiences of other Veterans; you are not alone.

Coaching Into Care:

A free, confidential coaching service that helps families and friends discover constructive ways to talk with Veterans about their concerns and treatment options. Visit **www.mirecc.va.gov/coaching/** or call 1-888-823-7458, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Time

SENATE BILLS/LEGISLATIVE

HR 705 Veterans 2nd Amendment Protection Act

This bill prohibits the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) from transmitting certain information to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) utilized by licensed importers or dealers of firearms. Specifically, the bill prohibits the VA from transmitting personally identifying information of a veteran or a beneficiary to the NICS solely on the basis that such veteran or beneficiary has an appointed fiduciary to manage their benefits, unless there is an order or finding of a judicial authority that such veteran or beneficiary is a danger to themselves or others.

Bill S.740 GUARD VA Benefits Act of 2023

The VFW strongly supports this legislation that would reinstate penalties for charging veterans and survivors unauthorized fees related to claims for VA benefit. These predatory companies use contracts that the veteran signs that result in a significant percentage of the disability will go to the predatory company.

Please inform all members of your Post do not sign with any individual or company that charges a fee. Please use a VSO in your area.

DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION CLAIMS

There is an increase in filing claims for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation for surviving spouse and dependent children or parent(s) of a veteran who died or died in the line of duty or due to a service-related injury or illness. Post Members need to immediately contact their accredited VSO in the Area (**Please see attached current accredited Service Officers/Claims Consultants contact information**) and make an appointment for the Family. **Post Service Officers** are not authorized to sign any forms related to any type of claim.

VFW ACTION CORPS

The VFW Action Corps is what gives the VFW its strength in advocating for benefits for our nation's heroes. The VFW Action Corps Weekly is an e-newsletter published every Friday to help keep patriotic Americans, that care about the military and veterans' communities, well informed of significant changes and updates to care and benefits for service members, veterans, and their families. Sign up or scan the QR code below:

<https://www.vfw.org/ActionCorpsSignup>



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Service Dogs

As defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), service dogs are individually trained to perform specific tasks and to work with people with disabilities. According to the ADA, disabilities can be “physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability.” The work of the service dog must be related to the handler’s disability.

These are just some of the things a service dog can do:

- Guide dogs help blind people navigate the world.
- Hearing (or signal) dogs alert deaf people to sounds, such as a knock on the door or a person entering the room.
- Psychiatric dogs are trained to detect and lessen the effects of a psychiatric episode.
- Service dogs help those in wheelchairs or who are otherwise physically limited. They may open doors or cabinets, fetch things their handler cannot reach, and carry items for their handler.
- Autism assistance dogs are trained to help those on the autism spectrum to distinguish important sensory signals, such as a smoke alarm, from other sensory input. They may also alert their handler to repetitive behaviors or overstimulation.
- Service dogs that are trained to recognize seizures and will stand guard over their handler during a seizure or go for help.

Therapy-Comfort Dogs

Although they are defined as comfort dogs and often used in therapeutic settings, therapy-comfort dogs are not considered service dogs under the ADA and do not have the same legal right to access in public spaces. **Therapy-Comfort dogs are not to be inside the VFW’s bar/restaurant area where food and drinks are being served.**