



FULFILLING OUR PROMISES  
TO THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO SERVED

Department of Ohio  
35 E. Chestnut Street, Room 503  
Columbus, Ohio 43215-2590  
tel (614) 221-3582  
fax (614) 221-4822  
dav.org

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## DAV Department of Ohio Newsletter *Centennial Issue*

### Department's Wreath-Laying Ceremony for Judge Robert Marx

On September 8, 2020, the Department of Ohio conducted a somber wreath-laying ceremony at the gravesite of Judge Robert S. Marx at the Walnut Hill Cemetery in Cincinnati, Ohio. Judge Marx, a highly decorated and wounded World War 1 veteran, is credited with founding the Disabled American Veterans (DAV).

The wreath-laying ceremony was coordinated with the Jewish Cemeteries of Greater Cincinnati, the DAV National Headquarters, the Hamilton County Veterans Service Commission, the Department of Veterans Affairs (Cincinnati); the City of Cincinnati and DAV Chapters #1 (Cincinnati); #15 (Hamilton); #63 (Clermont County); #115 (Northern Hills) and DAVA Unit #63 (Clermont County). Ohio Commander John Plahovinsak and DAV National Adjutant Marc Burgess addressed the solemn ceremony, which was very limited due to coronavirus concerns and at the mandated request of cemetery officials.

Chaplain David Leist, of the VAMC (Cincinnati), performed the closing service and our Past Department Commander (PDC) Raymond Hutchinson officially laid the wreath at the gravesite. DAV Chapter #15 served as the Honor Guard and also the Rifle Team for the ceremony and Chapter #63 Rick Keilholz served as the bugler.

Discussions are underway with the Executive Director of the Jewish Cemeteries of Greater Cincinnati for a service project involving DAV Chapters in the Greater Cincinnati area and also honoring Judge Marx on an annual basis. Department Office Manager Sherry Williamson coordinated the detailed wreath-laying ceremony.

Captain Marx was severely wounded on the last day of the war in the bloody Meuse-Argonne offensive while commanding his battalion. He was the recipient of the Purple Heart and the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions. The Department of Ohio is currently working with the DAV National Headquarters in obtaining the upgrade of Captain Marx's award to a Medal of Honor.

## **Veteran Treatment Court Legislation aids Disabled Veterans**

The Veteran Treatment Court Coordination Act of 2019 (H.R. 886) was signed by the President on August 8, 2020. This bill was supported by the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) and 21 other Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs). This legislation directs the Department of Justice to create a program that would provide funding and technical assistance to state and local governments with veteran treatment courts (VTCs) or the intent to begin one.

These VTCs specifically address the problems that veterans face, similar to the way a drug or mental health court provides treatment rather than punishment. The primary purpose of a VTC is not to punish, but rather to identify, treat and rehabilitate those disorders incurred while serving in military service.

Veterans who have served overseas and in combat have acquired a unique set of problems which caused involvement with the justice system. Examples of these problems include both substance and opioid abuse, PTSD, traumatic brain injuries, or military sexual trauma.

According to the Ohio Department of Veterans Services (ODVS), there are 24 VTCs within the State of Ohio. (*A listing is available at the ODVS website.*) In 2018, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has reported the existence of 551 functioning VTCs within the United States.

Veterans selected to participate in the VTC programs meet regularly with their court judges and volunteer veteran mentors, who provide advice, guidance and counseling. Several DAV members, such as Past Department Commander (PDC) David May and State Commander John Plahovinsak, were appointed by court judges and have participated as court mentors in the VTCs.

Although the VTCs are currently funded by local governments, this legislation will now provide federal assistance. These programs are supported by dedicated individuals in law enforcement, the judicial system, the legal community, VA officials, VSO, and other community organizations.

This legislation was introduced by Rep. Charlie Crist and had 136 co-sponsors. The five Ohio Members of Congress that co-sponsored the legislation were: Representatives Anthony Gonzalez, Bill Johnson, Marcy Kaptur, Michael Turner and Tim Ryan.

## Improvements to Veterans Education Bill enacted into Law

Representative Gregorio Kilili Sablan's sponsored H.R. 2934 bill was merged into another bill and signed into law on August 8, 2020. This legislation will allow disabled veterans and their eligible family members to use their GI Bill educational benefits to cover the cost of preparatory courses for license and certification exams. The DAV has been supporting this type of legislation for several years.

This legislation allows the Veterans Administration (VA) to pay the fees for courses that prepare disabled veterans for license and certification tests. For example, a local college may offer a \$400 course to help prepare the veteran for the NCLEX nurse licensing exam. The new law allows the GI bill to cover this cost. Prior to enactment of the law, only the test fees were covered by the GI Bill.

Making more benefits available to disabled veterans has directly aligned with the DAV's Mission Statement which seeks to empower disabled veterans. The Department of Ohio has been briefing Critical Legislative Issues with Congressman Sablan's Office for the last five years during the DAV Annual Mid-Winter Conferences in Washington, D.C. He is a firm supporter of disabled veterans.

## DAV Centennial Proclamation/Resolutions Effort

September 25, 2020, will mark the DAV's 100th year of service to the nation's service-disabled veterans. In keeping with this historic occasion, the Department of Ohio is encouraging all chapters to work with their locally elected officials to recognize and celebrate this special milestone in the DAV history. In mid-August, each chapter commander/adjutant/or chapter official was emailed several examples of proclamations/resolutions that could be used as a model for your elected officials. Of course, the examples should be "tailored/modified" for your chapter.

Local elected officials are often eager to help recognize the contributions of nationally known charitable organizations, such as the DAV. The proclamations/resolutions would be requesting your local officials to designate September 25, 2020, as "Disabled American Veterans Day" in their respective cities, townships and counties. The Department of Ohio has already taken the necessary action to request this designation at the higher governmental levels of the State of Ohio. This action should increase the visibility of the chapters in the local area and may spur new members to join.

## **Legislation signed to increase Disabled Veterans' Housing Access**

On August 8, 2020, President Trump signed the Ryan Kules and Paul Benne Specially Adaptive Housing Act of 2019 for disabled and blind veterans. This legislation will provide the veterans with additional access to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) housing grants to renovate their homes to accommodate their disabilities.

The enacted bill, H.R. 3504, increases the annual number of VA grant applications for specially adaptive housing (SAH) projects from 30 to 120. This legislation also increases the total maximum grant benefits for the SAH projects from \$63,780 per grant to \$98,492 per grant.

The new legislation also allows SAH grant applicants to apply for a new grant ten years after exhausting their initial housing grant. The new law also specifically lists blind veterans, but otherwise able-bodied veterans, to the list of eligible applicants for the SAH grants. The program states the housing grant money, for service-connected disabled veterans, will be used to add adaptive features to their homes, which will provide the veterans with independent-living features.

In addition, this would authorize the VA to provide additional SAH funding beyond the dollar cap to Veterans whose home no longer meets their needs ten years after they use the funding for their first grant.

"This needed legislation will provide our nation's veterans greater support through a modernized and expanded SAH grant program, allowing the grants to be utilized in a way that best fits the needs of the disabled veteran," explained Sen. Jerry Moran, the sponsor of the legislation.

## **DAV Centennial Bell Cast with Department of Ohio's Contributions**

The DAV National Headquarters has cast a 1,000-pound Centennial Bell to pay homage to the current and past members of the DAV. The Department of Ohio has submitted a Commander's Challenge Coin and also the Department's Challenge Coin to be melted in the casting of the Centennial Bell. Two small pieces of the World Trade Center (WTC), a World War I helmet and a DAV belt buckle will also be melted in the casting. The Centennial Bell will be on display in the foyer of the DAV National Headquarters in Cold Springs. The Department of Ohio is proud to participate in the casting of the Centennial Bell!

## **Congress Reacts to Department of Ohio's Legislative Briefing**

On August 27, 2020, Representative Anthony Gonzalez introduced the *VA Peer Specialists Act* in Congress to expand access to peer support services. Peer specialists are Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) employees who provide support and assistance to help fellow veterans in recovery to successfully engage in mental health and substance use treatment. The bill will also improve staffing of the program by including more women in peer specialist positions at the VA.

According to the DAV's Report, *Women Veterans: The Journey Ahead*, there are over 1,000 peer support specialists around the country. The DAV Report states peer support specialists have been proven to help reduce stigma, expand access to mental health care, and improve recovery outcomes.

However, as of May 2017, only 18 percent of peer support specialists were women, and many of them were concentrated in specific areas of the country. As a result, many women veterans lack access to gender-specific care. *This was one of the key issues that the Department of Ohio's Legislative Team discussed with our elected representatives during the 2020 Mid-Winter Conference.*

The VA Peer Specialist Act would directly address the shortage of women peer support specialists by requiring the VA to conduct an in-depth analysis of its current staffing plan; the geographic distribution of the specialists; what percentage of these specialists focus on mental health/suicide prevention; and report to Congress.

The DAV Department is glad that Congress is listening to our requests to improve the VA services for our women veterans. We are making a difference!

### ***The New LVAP Volunteer Reporting: How To Webinar***

The DAV National Voluntary Services Supervisor will be conducting a webinar on September 23, 2020, from 2:00 pm to 3:30 pm on the new procedures for the Local Veterans Assistance Program (LVAP) Reporting System. To attend this webinar, you are asked to register for the webinar, before Tuesday, September 22, 2020 at: <http://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/1342766888646783244> The Department encourages you to register for this webinar and you will get a confirmation email.

John Plahovinsak  
Department of Ohio  
Department Commander

Michael Stith  
Department of Ohio  
Department Adjutant