

From: [Raymond Watts](#)
To: [BoardOperations](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] County Board Meeting 2/6 Agenda Item #15 (LF#24-4219).
Date: Monday, February 5, 2024 9:54:12 PM

Madam President and County Board Supervisors request your unanimous approval of Item #15 3 VSR I/II positions within the Santa Clara County Veteran Service Office [VSO].

The VSO is a small highly efficient team of 16 staff members (when fully staffed), including 10 state and nationally accredited Veterans Services Representatives [VSRs]. Their dedication extends to serving all 65,000+ veterans in Santa Clara County, along with their dependents, which likely doubles this number. It's important to add that they extend assistance to veterans from any part of the US. The impact of their assistance on veterans and families has been profound and life changing. Benefits provided include disability compensation, non-service-connected pensions, education, burial assistance, dependency indemnity compensation, VA health care applications, and more

Here are a couple of compelling examples: *1/An unhoused veteran received over \$300k in retroactive payments for his claim with our assistance, has achieved stability, and is now actively contributing by using his earned compensation to support other veterans in need. 2/A surviving spouse, initially lost in the appeals process following her veteran husband's passing, sought our help in desperation. With our assistance, she successfully navigated the appeal, securing over \$100,000 in retroactive payments and monthly survivors' compensation. They have hundreds of these stories that are waiting to be told.*

VSO also significantly contributes to the local economy, accounting for over \$15 million in new federal veteran benefits brought back into the county in 2023. Adding the three VSRs is a good business investment for the county.

Since the implementation of the PACT Act on August 10, 2022, the VSO caseload has surged to ~350-400 per VSR. Furthermore, outreach efforts have increased 260% in 2023 (108) compared to 2022 (50).

The urgent need for three additional VSRs is evident as they strive to alleviate the higher caseload per VSR and extend outreach efforts for providing essential services to veterans and their families. Thus, offsetting the contributing factor for office attrition and burn-out of existing team members resulting from significant caseloads.

VSO also has supported numerous veteran's county events such as Memorial Day, Veteran's day and most recently the Santa Clara County Veteran Stand down at the fairgrounds where over 2K veterans had access to critical services from VA PA, Housing, Employment, Medical Care, Legal Advice and others. The team has been instrumental in arranging the mobile dental clinic to provide much need basic dental services to Veterans. The same mobile service this board overwhelming approved to fund before the FY23 holiday break.

Most impactful is the outreach to unhoused, food insecure and high risk veterans residing in local encampments. This outreach aligns with the Governors support of Prop1 for the unhoused Veterans statewide. Let's proactive address the issue by the addition of three dedicated, highly efficient and caring VSRs to the VSO team.

Respectfully,

Ray Watts COL (R) USA

President

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