



24-4219-01

**DATE:** February 27, 2024 (Item No. {{item.number}})

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

**FROM:** Daniel Little, Director, Social Services Agency

**SUBJECT:** Appropriation Modification and Salary Ordinance to add three VSR positions in VSO

### **RECOMMENDED ACTION**

Final adoption of Salary Ordinance No. NS-5.24.54, an Ordinance amending Santa Clara County Salary Ordinance No. NS-5.24 relating to compensation of employees adding three Veterans Services Representative II or Veterans Services Representative I positions in the Social Services Agency.

### **FISCAL IMPLICATIONS**

For the remainder of Fiscal Year (FY) 2023-2024, the cost of the three alternately staffed Veterans Services Representatives (VSR) I/II positions to be added is \$113,637, with \$36,364 in federal revenue and \$77,273 in net County cost, which will be funded by General Fund Contingency Reserve.

In FY 2024-2025, the cost of the three alternately staffed VSR I/II positions to be added is \$494,316 with \$158,181 in federal revenue and \$336,135 in net County cost, which will be funded by General Fund Contingency Reserve.

The Adopted Budget for the FY 2023-2024 General Fund Contingency Reserve is \$218,587,995. The balance of this reserve as of February 6, 2024, is \$208,875,262 indicating that a net of \$9,712,733 has been allocated for other purposes. There may be additional pending actions that will impact this balance once they are approved and processed. Board policy 4.3 states that the contingency reserve should be 5% of general revenues net of pass-through revenue. Since the use of contingency reserve impacts compliance with this policy, the midyear budget analysis may include a recommended action to replenish this reserve.

### **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION AND BACKGROUND**

At the October 3, 2023, Board of Supervisors meeting (Item No. 11), Supervisors Simitian and Lee requested that Administration report to the Board at the FY 2023-2024 Mid-Year Budget Review to add two alternately staffed VSR I/II and one alternately staffed VSR II/III to the Veterans Services Office (VSO).

As the VSR III job code does not exist, three VSR II/I positions are being requested to support VSO's staffing and service needs. A request to add the supervisory classification was evaluated; adding a new supervisory classification, however, is not recommended as there is an existing Program Manager I who performs the supervisory functions. Also, through recent contract negotiations, the number of leads allowable in the VSO doubled.

Since October 2022, VSO has witnessed a notable turnover rate, with 10 of the eighteen positions experiencing staff changes. The reasons for these changes vary but can be broadly categorized into two distinct areas: career growth and personal circumstances. Specifically, seven staff members vacated their positions to pursue career advancement opportunities, while three separated due to personal circumstances. Increases in workloads due to the combination of high vacancies and increased demand for VSO services from the veteran community attributed to personal circumstance turnover. The relatively flat organizational structure resulted in limited opportunities for career growth within a highly specialized and narrow career field. After highlighting the existence of this lack of career growth in the VSO, management took immediate steps to designate an additional VSR II Lead position and create a Program Manager I position and VSR Supervisor positions, enabling greater career growth pathways for professional growth and advancement in the VSO.

The Department is working on sharing more information on these challenges through an off-agenda report to be issued by February 2, 2024.

#### Addressing Staffing Needs:

In addition to expanding the opportunities for career growth at the VSO, the three VSR II/I positions within the VSO is expected to ease caseload growth experienced by staff, while broadening team resources to address the needs of veterans seeking assistance. Current staffing levels at the VSO, to include the three additional VSR II/I, are recommended by SSA to be sustained in the FY 2024-2025 recommended budget. Veteran needs will be reviewed through the fiscal year to determine future support for veterans, including additional clerical support through Office Specialists and service support through Social Workers.

The VSO is a County and State funded agency established in 1944 to support the veteran population emerging from WW1 and WW2. Over the past 80 years, the VSO's mission has been to assist Veterans, Military Personnel, and their Families in obtaining federal, state, and local benefits earned through active-duty military service. During this time, the veteran population within Santa Clara County has grown to over 65,000 veterans, which continues to grow each year. The State of California statutory requirements related to the Veterans Services Departments are contained in the Military and Veterans Code (M&V Code or M&VC), Article 4, Sections 970 through 974.5, and the California Code of Regulations (CCR), Title 12, Sections 450 through 455. The United States Department of Veterans Affairs statutory requirements related to the County VSO program are contained in Title 38, U.S. Code, Sections 1.503, 1.524, 1.525, and 14.626 through 14.633.

Benefits provided include disability compensation, non-service-connected pensions, education, burial assistance, dependency indemnity compensation, VA health care applications, and more. All staff in the VSO hold accreditation obtained through US Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) approved training and proctored testing both with

the State of California and the National Association of County Veteran Services Officers. Completion of training and becoming fully accredited requires eight to twelve months and enables VSO staff to file claims on behalf of and review the status of submitted claims with the USDVA. VSRs are expertly knowledgeable in administering Title 38, Code of Federal Regulations, medical conditions and their co-relation to military service, records and military document management and research, and evidence development.

Employee Services Agency supports the recommended actions.

### **CHILD IMPACT**

The recommended action will positive impact on children and youth through the distribution of USDVA dependent allowances provided to veterans receiving monetary benefits.

### **SENIOR IMPACT**

The recommended action will have a positive impact on senior veterans, their families, and surviving spouses positively. Nationally, over 49% of veterans are over 65, reflecting the aging Vietnam War-era veteran population. Within Santa Clara County, the VSO currently supports over 20,626 senior veterans, their families, and surviving spouses with access to medical benefits and compensation provided through the USDVA.

### **SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

The recommended action will have no/neutral sustainability implications.

### **CONSEQUENCES OF NEGATIVE ACTION**

VSO would not receive approval to add three VSR I/II positions to meet staffing and department needs.

### **STEPS FOLLOWING APPROVAL**

The Clerk of the Board is requested to send notifications of completion to Darlyn Escalante and Daniel Crick of the Social Services Agency, and Jennifer Paredes-Fricano of ESA.

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

- NS-5.24.54 - SSA - Adding three Veteran Services Rep II or Veteran Services Rep I in BU 501
- F85-145 Add 3 VSO FTE