

Joint Committee on Kansas Security

By Gregg Burden

Director, Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs Office

November 9, 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to brief the Joint Committee on Kansas Security. I am Gregg Burden, Director of the Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs Office (KCVAO). Attending with me today is our Deputy Director and Veteran Services Director, Wayne Bollig, our Chief Property and Fiscal Officer, Pam Rodriguez and our Cemetery Director, Eric Rohleder.

The mission of the Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs Office (KCVAO) is to serve Kansas veterans, survivors, and their dependents with dignity and compassion. The Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs Office (KCVAO) is privileged to support the quarter million veterans who live in the State of Kansas along with the estimated 350,000 dependents and survivors. The KCVAO is a principal advocate in ensuring that they receive information, advice, direction, and assistance through the coordination of programs and services on state and federal benefits: medical care, benefits, social support, and lasting memorials in recognition of their service to Kansas and the nation.

The goal of the Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs Office is to ensure Kansas veterans and their families receive all the services and benefits they have earned in the most efficient and cost effective manner possible. These services and benefits include; long-term nursing and assisted living care to eligible veterans and dependents, interment options and maintenance of four state veterans' cemeteries, and coordination with federal agencies to provide financial assistance to Kansas veterans for health care and disability income.

The past year has been extremely challenging for our agency but all of us feel that our organization has made significant improvements in many areas and has implemented new programs which will help standardize our process and procedures while benefiting our agency and the veterans of Kansas. We are extremely excited about the changes and progress our organization has made and look forward to continuing this positive momentum.

Two years ago the passage of House Substitute Bill 2681 abolished the Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs (KCVA) and created the Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs Office (KCVAO) and the Veterans Claims Assistance Program. The agency is no longer governed by a 5 member commission and is now under the supervision of the Director who is appointed by the Governor and subject to confirmation by the Kansas Senate. The bill also abolished the Veterans Claims Assistance Advisory Board and replaced this Advisory Board with the Veterans Claims Assistance Program (VCAP). The Veterans Claims Assistance Program Advisory Board will advise the Director of the KCVAO on all veterans' services, including the VCAP program. We are pleased that the agency transition has been implemented successfully.

A little over a year ago the Kansas Veterans Home in Winfield and the Kansas Soldiers Home at Ft. Dodge implemented significant upgrades with both facilities installing new servers and wireless systems which significantly enhance patient security and capability at each facility. Each home also implemented a new software program, PointClickCare which includes direct care and financial modules that utilizes tablet technology and collects healthcare data at the bedside of a resident. Our homes are well on the way to achieving a paperless

medical record environment. We are also pleased with the coordination that the placement of 1st choice of veterans requiring domiciliary or long term care is in the Kansas Soldiers Home and Kansas Veterans Home from the Wichita VA.

Our approved FY 2017 capital improvement plan contains two projects for the Kansas Veterans' Home, eight projects for the Kansas Soldiers' Home and three projects for the Cemetery Program. The Veterans' Home projects are replacement of flooring in Triplett Hall and replacement of all windows in Bleckley Hall. The window replacements will greatly enhance resident comfort, and the current single-pane windows develop condensation and do not perform an efficient job in keeping cold air from seeping into resident rooms.

The Soldiers' Home projects include the Custer House kitchen and bathrooms renovations, Pershing Barracks access renovation, the Halsey Hall kitchen remodeling, Lincoln Hall electrical upgrade, installing a covered entrance for Halsey Hall, replacing roofs in five cottages, and renovating the access for Lincoln and Grant Halls. Both the Pershing and Lincoln/Grant Halls' access will make those building entrances ADA-compliant. The Halsey Hall kitchen remodeling will make the kitchen operation more energy-efficient. This kitchen provides meals for all residents throughout the campus. The Lincoln Hall electrical update will install additional electrical outlets in resident rooms. With the advancement of electronics, most residents do not have enough outlets to accommodate their needs. The covered entrance in Halsey Hall will protect residents entering into vehicles during inclement weather, keeping the rain or snow from the residents.

For FY 2018 the KCVAO is requesting approval for eight projects at the Kansas Veterans Home and six projects at the Kansas Soldiers Home.

- KVH Retrofit Sewage Lift Station for Donlon Hall – original equipment is over 30 years old and if were to experience a sewage backup residents would have to be relocated.
- Install Covered Walkway for Bleckley and Donlon Hall – provides covered walkway from the buildings to the loading/unloading areas for residents and visitors.
- Replace Double Doors (4) for Bleckly Hall – these were the original doors from the old State Hospital and require replacement to meet code.
- Replace Ceiling Fan Coil Units in Gulf War Hallway – these were the original units from the State Hospital and do not work and are unable to control humidity through climate control.
- Replace Double Doors (2) in Gulf War Hallway - these were the original doors from the old State Hospital and require replacement to meet code.
- Replace Air Handlers for Timmerman Hall – these units are over 30 years old and aid in controlling the facility temperature in rooms.
- Window Replacement at Staff Homes (3) – the windows are single-pane and in need of replacement with a total of 85 windows.
- Hagemeister and Ferguson Doors Installation – residents here can't access the courtyard and this project will provide a new ADA compliant entrance.
- Demolition of Campus Structures – buildings include 318 Pershing, building 226 and 332, and 434 Custer.
- Campus Wide Security Cameras – installation of a campus wide security camera/video monitoring system to enhance the security and safety for all residents and staff.
- Keyless Entry Campus Wide – this project will address exterior and interior door systems campus wide.
- Pershing Emergency Power System – ensure staff and residents can safely exit building and provide backup power to computer systems.

- Lincoln Hall Covered Breezeway – will replace the flat roof structure with A-frame roof at four breezeways and two porch locations.
- Custer House HVAC Renovation – this will replace the current system of window air conditioners, fans, steam/radiator distribution system, and space heaters for the residence.

We also completed the Ft. Dodge Facility Master plan this year which will provide our agency useful information on facilities and projects for the future. All of these projects at both facilities will enhance the quality of life of our residents and staff and also improve the safety and security of our facility. The KCVAO will continue to evaluate all aspects of our facilities in order to provide the high quality of care our veterans deserve.

The Veteran Services Program also experienced positive changes over the past year including opening a new Veteran Service Office at Washburn Tech and acquiring a new mobile van which will enhance our access to rural areas of Kansas.

The Kansas Veteran Cemetery Program continues to provide veterans and their eligible dependents with internment opportunities for burial in one of our four Veteran cemeteries. The Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs Office believes that veterans deserve to be interred with dignity, respect and honor for their service. Our program will always provide quality support veterans and their families and we continue to recognize and celebrate their service at wonderful events including Wreaths Across America Celebration and Memorial Day events.

I want to emphasize that we have made significant progress in our agency the last few years but also have new and ongoing issues that could impact the operations of our programs in the future. Our first issue concerns the Caps on Federal Funds (6 of 32) which have been in place for approximately 10 years. These Caps make it very difficult to access money from certain accounts and force the agency to carry over balances into the next fiscal year. In recent years we have come close to not meeting our fiscal obligations because of the Caps. In other words, we could go broke with money in the bank. Our agency is also concerned about the potential 5% reduction which could impact our services to veterans.

This is just a brief overview of the services and programs the KCVAO provides. On behalf of the KCVAO, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to brief the committee and for your continued support. I look forward to working with the Joint Committee on Kansas Security and other parties as we move forward working together helping veterans and their dependents. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully,



Gregg Burden

Director

Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs Office