



Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs Fiscal Year 2024–2025

At a Glance:

Commissioner: Ronald P. Welch, BG US Army (Ret.)

Deputy Commissioner: Joseph Danao II

Established: 1986

Statutory Authority: C.G.S. Chapter 506 Sec. 27-102i – 27-140ii

Central Office: 287 West Street, Rocky Hill, CT 06067

Number of Full-Time Employees: 213

Recurring Operating Expenses 2024–2025: \$25,144,380.00

Agency Generated Revenue/Claims 2024–2025: \$32,994,600.00

Organizational Structure: Executive Branch State Agency. The Office of the Commissioner oversees all aspects of the agency. The agency has four core function areas:

- 1) Skilled Nursing Home Care and Rehabilitation
- 2) Residential Programs and Services
- 3) Office of Advocacy and Assistance
- 4) Cemetery and Memorial Services.

These four functions are supported by additional agency divisions as follows: Projects & Operations, Facilities, Legal, Food Services, Human Resources, Fiscal and Procurement, Safety and Security, and Community Advocacy. Each division has a manager or director who reports directly to the Commissioner.

Additionally, Connecticut Veterans Affairs reports to a Board of Trustees (CGS Chapter 506, Sec. 27-102n), which is made up of eighteen voting members with diverse backgrounds in healthcare, business management, social services, and

law with the common interest of supporting Connecticut Veterans. Board of Trustees members also include the Veterans' Council Presidents for the Residential Program and Healthcare Center. Board of Trustees meetings are open to the public and held quarterly. Meetings take place at the Connecticut Veterans Affairs campus in Rocky Hill and include a virtual or dial-in option.

History:

Connecticut Veterans Affairs is the nation's first and longest operating State Veterans Home. Benjamin Fitch, a Connecticut businessman and philanthropist, promised Civil War soldiers a place to call home when they returned from battle. Thus, the Fitch's Home for Soldiers and their Orphans was opened in 1863 in Darien, CT. The Home was dedicated on July 4, 1864, and is currently incorporated into the Connecticut General Assembly.

In 1940, the Home moved to its current location in Rocky Hill, and with each succeeding period of war, new generations of Veterans presented unique needs requiring the development of comprehensive services. To best serve our Veterans, the Connecticut General Assembly established the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) in 1986. Today, the DVA serves Connecticut's estimated 150,000 Veterans with four core services: (1) Skilled Nursing Care and Rehabilitation, (2) Residential and Rehabilitative Programs and Services, (3) Office of Advocacy and Assistance with Veteran Service Officers (VSOs) located in each Congressional District, and (4) Cemetery and Memorial Services with cemeteries in Darien, Rocky Hill, and the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown.



Mission: “Serving Those Who Served”

Enhance the lives of Connecticut’s Veterans by providing:

1. Skilled nursing home care to eligible Veterans.
2. Residential services providing a continuum of housing and rehabilitative programs to eligible Veterans and Veteran families.
3. Advocacy and assistance to Veterans, their eligible spouses, and dependents in obtaining benefits they may be entitled to under federal, state, and local laws.
4. Assisting Veterans and their families with burial and memorial services at the Middletown State Veterans Cemetery or Colonel Raymond F. Gates Cemetery in Rocky Hill.

Vision:

Provide Connecticut Veterans and their dependents proactive, comprehensive, and value-based services by cultivating a compassionate, collaborative, engaging, and inclusive environment in partnership with Veteran service organizations, community partners, and with local, state, and federal agenci



Statutory Responsibility:

Office of the Commissioner

The Commissioner is appointed by the Governor and is responsible for the administration of the agency. The Commissioner is tasked with assisting Veterans and their eligible family members in accessing the benefits accrued to them under federal, state and local laws. This is accomplished through training, employment and reemployment programs, healthcare and rehabilitation programs, housing services, and burial benefits. The Commissioner is also responsible for outreach and consultation to state and community agencies, statutory and legislative authorities, and Veteran service organizations.

The Commissioner oversees the enforcement of regulations and procedures enacted in accordance with the provisions of General Statutes Chapters 54 and 506, including all appeals and decisions which adversely affect benefits for Veterans participating in state programs. Additionally, the Commissioner oversees the development of long-range agency plans and current program evaluation and assessment, and the collaborative development of state-wide initiatives which aim to better serve our more than 150,000 Connecticut Veterans and their families.

Sgt. John L. Levitow Healthcare Center

The Healthcare Center (HCC) is certified by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and is licensed by the CT Department of Public Health as a 125-bed skilled nursing facility. Likewise, it is certified by the Veterans Administration as a State Veterans Home. The Healthcare Center provides comprehensive person-centered care to Veterans requiring nursing home level of care.



A Veteran requesting admission to the John L. Levitow Healthcare Center must be a resident of the State of Connecticut and have served honorably. Applications for admission are required in advance and contain financial and medical components. Applicants are screened in accordance with state and federal guidelines as well as Connecticut Veterans Affairs policies.

The Healthcare Center adheres to all federal regulations (Title 42: Public Health) and Connecticut state statutes (Chapter 368; Health Care Institutions).

Residential Programs and Services

Residential Programs and Services offers supportive living with programming designed to assist Connecticut Veterans successfully transition to community living. Residential programming utilizes a continuum of rehabilitation services, including social work, case management, recovery support, health clinic services, recreation, compensated work therapy, vocational training and assistance, and education counseling. The Residential Program can accommodate 154 Veterans. Residential Programs and Services also maintains Patriot's Landing. Patriot's Landing offers temporary family housing for Veterans, their spouses, and children who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

The Office of Advocacy and Assistance

The Office of Advocacy and Assistance (OA&A) assists Veterans and their families in accessing federal, state, and local benefits and entitlements. OA&A Veteran Service Officers (VSOs) are Veterans accredited by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to assist Veterans and their families with claims filing for disability, compensation, and or pension. Office of Advocacy and Assistance offices are in each of the five Congressional Districts including Fairfield, Waterbury, Milford, Rocky Hill, and Norwich.



Additionally, advocacy work is performed statewide through OA&A attendance at job, senior and health fairs and conferences. Veteran Service Officers conduct interviews in skilled nursing homes, Stand Down events, and in response to received inquiries and referrals.

Veterans Cemetery and Memorial Services

The Cemetery and Memorial Services Office is located in Rocky Hill. The Connecticut Veterans Affairs Cemetery system consists of three state cemeteries: the Connecticut State Veterans Cemetery, located in Middletown; Colonel Raymond F. Gates Cemetery, located in Rocky Hill; and Spring Grove Cemetery, located in Darien, which closed for interments in 1980 due to capacity. The State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown is open for burials six days a week and contains over 16,000 remains of Connecticut Veterans and their spouses and eligible dependents. Colonel Raymond F. Gates Cemetery is reserved for the burials of Veterans residing on the Connecticut Veterans Affairs campus, either at the Residential Program or Healthcare Center.

Connecticut Veterans Affairs is responsible for the care, maintenance, and development of all three cemeteries, including installation of headstones. Cemetery and Memorial Services is responsible for consultation and assistance to families, including coordination of burial benefits, burial plot coordination, ordering headstone and foot markers, interment ceremonies, processing of federal reimbursement payments, and coordination of memorial ceremonies.

Public Service:

Sgt. John L. Levitow Healthcare Center

The Healthcare Center is a Five-Star Medicare rated facility providing care to Veterans requiring twenty-four-hour skilled nursing care. A plan of care is



developed and continually updated throughout a Veteran's stay to ensure individualized services are in place to assist a Veteran in reaching his or her maximum potential. Person-centered planning ensures Veterans' preferences are honored and reflected in his or her plan of care.

Through the direction of the Administrator, the Healthcare Center offers progressive programming encompassing medical, social, spiritual, recreational, rehabilitative, palliative, and end-of-life services in a Veteran-centric atmosphere.

The Healthcare Center treats a wide array of diagnoses, including, but not limited to, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), Congestive Heart Failure (CHF), end stage Renal Disease, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Accident (CVA), Parkinson's Disease and dementia. The Healthcare Center's medical team consists of Board-Certified Physicians and Advanced Practice Registered Nurses who co-manage treatment plans with the Federal Veterans Affairs where specialty care is offered for Veterans who present with complex conditions.

The Rehabilitation Program offers physical, speech, and occupational therapy where Veterans can increase strengthening and physical function under the supervision of professionals. The Rehabilitation Program contributes to overall mental health and well-being. Included in the department is a team of Therapeutic Recreational Therapists, who provide an array of leisure activities greatly enhancing daily life for Veterans. The gym and recreational areas are well equipped and feature large windows showcasing the picturesque Connecticut Veterans Affairs campus. The end-of-life program provides unique medical, psychological and spiritual care to terminally ill Veterans and their loved ones. Pain management, nursing visits, alternative therapies, and volunteer companions are provided to comfort the Veteran at the end of his or her life, and specialized counseling services are offered to loved ones.



Residential Facility Programs and Services

For the 2024-2025 fiscal year, thirty-eight Veteran Residents were admitted, and twelve Veteran Residents successfully transitioned back to the community. The average daily census for 2024-2025 was 122 Veterans for the Residential Program and 5 families for Patriot's Landing.

Vocational Department:

The Vocational Department provides support to Veterans to achieve his or her vocational goals and continues to make referrals for Veterans to receive additional employment readiness and job search assistance from partners at the CT Department of Labor. Additionally, guidance and consultation are provided to gainfully employed Veterans to achieve employment retention. During the 2024-2025 fiscal year fourteen Veteran Residents were gainfully employed either full or part-time. Likewise, two Veteran Residents held volunteer positions at local community organizations. During the 2024-2025 fiscal year Veteran Residents were active in enhancing their skills and educational qualifications to increase employability. Veteran Residents attended in-person educational programs at local community colleges, universities, and private training organizations. One Veteran attended Tunxis Community College to pursue an associate degree, and one Veteran completed an online Medical Coding program, which was funded by CT Veterans Affairs.

Veterans at the Residential Program continue to participate in the Veteran Vocational and Therapeutic Program (VVTP). The VVTP is designed to address the diverse needs of the Veteran population at Connecticut Veterans Affairs. The vocational component offers individualized employment services to Veterans to improve work skills and assist Veterans in transitioning to independent community living. The therapeutic component is intended for Veterans not seeking gainful employment. Thus, providing Veterans an opportunity to



engage in purposeful, social and therapeutic activities while planning their transition to independent living. The VVTP had twenty-four participants for the 2024- 2025 fiscal year. At the end of the fiscal year, the VVTP had nineteen participants. During the 2024-2025 fiscal year, two Veterans participating in the VVTP transitioned to a higher level of care and five participants left the program for reasons including increases in other benefits, agency disciplinary action, medical issues, and successful discharge from the Residential Program. During the 2024-2025 fiscal year, the VVTP was reviewed for best practices. Recommendations for improvement were made to the Commissioner’s Office.

Substance Use Treatment/Recovery Support:

Through a Memorandum of Understanding between the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) and the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), substance use treatment and recovery support continue to be provided to Veterans residing at the Residential Program. Veteran’s Recovery Support provides outpatient programming and services to DVA Veterans, Veterans in the community, and National Guard members. The program is staffed by a Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor (LADC). Several Veteran Residents received support from the LADC during fiscal year 2024-2025. In addition to the Veteran’s Recovery Support provider, Connecticut Veteran Affairs maintains a contract with CCAR (Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery) to provide addiction support to Veterans. CCAR has been providing weekly support groups on Tuesday afternoons and peer recovery services that can be accessed via telephone. In June of 2025, a CCAR representative attended DVA’s Veterans Coffee House to provide encouragement and resources to Veterans.



Gambling Recovery Support:

During fiscal year 2024-2025, Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) continued their agreement with the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) Problem Gambling Services (PGS) division to offer Veteran Residents integrated services emphasizing problem gambling awareness and problem gambling support services. A site visit was conducted in December 2024 by the Disordered Integration Gambling Initiative team, which concluded that the DVA continues to demonstrate excellence in providing resources, support, and assessment to Veterans. Resources and gambling facts were displayed throughout the Residential Program during Gambling Awareness Month in March 2025. Problem gambling questions and screenings have been incorporated into the new Electronic Health Record (EHR) system that went live in May 2025. Through gambling awareness and encouragement from staff, one veteran was able to successfully complete inpatient treatment for gambling addiction.

Patriots' Landing Temporary Housing Program (Veteran Families):

Patriots' Landing has operated since 2014 and offers temporary housing, up to two years, to Veterans and their families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Connecticut Veterans Affairs can accommodate physical housing for up to five Veteran families. All houses come fully furnished and maintenance and utility costs are covered by the agency. Veteran families and Residential Staff work collaboratively with case managers provided through a Memorandum of Agreement with the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. Active case management ensures that each Veteran family receives the necessary benefits and services to successfully transition to permanent community housing. During the 2024-2025 fiscal year, there were two transitions to independent community living and one admission to the program, with an average occupancy rate of 100%.



Advocacy and Assistance

The Office of Advocacy and Assistance (OA&A) is responsible for assisting Veterans and their families in accessing federal, state, and local benefits and entitlements. Veterans Service Officers (VSOs), accredited by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, assist Veterans and their families with documentation and filing of claims for disability, compensation and/or pension.

In fiscal year 2024-2025, OA&A responded to over 31,000 requests for assistance from Veterans. The Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs, as an accredited Veterans Service Organization, formally represented over 10,000 Veterans across the state. OA&A submitted, on behalf of Connecticut Veterans, over 2,260 claims to the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs. This representation yields over \$195,000,000.00 annually in disability, pension, and other benefit payments that go directly to Connecticut Veterans and eligible family members.

During fiscal year 2024-2025, OA&A continued to review eligibility statuses of Veterans and/or dependents of Veterans across the state's skilled nursing homes and assisted living facilities. The Office continues to conduct in-person visits to nursing homes and assisted living facilities as time permits and maintains working relationships with facility administrators. These benefits have provided direct savings to the state where the individuals are Medicaid recipients, and in other cases, served to delay the time when individuals need to access state-funded services.

Additionally, OA&A manages the Connecticut Wartime Service Medals and Registry program, which awarded 997 medals in fiscal year 2024-2025, bringing the total number of Wartime Service Medals awarded to eligible Veterans to over 42,000 recipients since 2006.



Likewise, OA&A manages the Veterans Identity on the CT Driver's License Program. The Office is responsible for verifying the service of the CT Veteran and transmitting that information to the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles with 1,671 applications processed during the 2024-2025 fiscal year. Since the inception of the program in January 2013, more than 18,500 applications have been processed by OA&A.

Moreover, OA&A provides training for all 169 town, city, and municipal Veteran Representatives. The Municipal Veterans Representative program provides a single source point of contact in the Veteran's hometown to act as a liaison for Veterans' benefits and services. To date, more than 148 towns have appointed a Veteran Representative and over 250 volunteers have completed a benefits training seminar since the training was first offered in October 2012. The annual municipal Veteran Representative training was held on June 13, 2025, with over 85 CT municipalities in attendance.

OA&A provides certification of Veteran owned micro-businesses. In fiscal year 2024-2025, the office certified 17 businesses.

The Connecticut Veterans INFO line (1-866-9CT-VETS) continues to receive an average of 30 calls per day. This number provides Veterans an easy access to general benefit information, assistance with requesting military records, referrals to other state agencies, and helpful information on the location and availability of the Congressional District Offices.

Cemetery and Memorial Services Office

The Connecticut State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown is open for burials six days a week and has 17,684 casket burial sites, cremains burial sites and columbarium niches. Currently, 16,908 Veterans and eligible dependents are buried in the cemetery. The Colonel Raymond F. Gates Cemetery has 2,341 burial



sites and currently 1,622 Veterans and eligible dependents are buried in the cemetery. Burials in the Raymond F. Gates Cemetery are generally restricted to residents of our Healthcare Center and Residential Program. The Spring Grove Cemetery closed for interments in 1980.

During fiscal year 2024-2025, 745 interments were performed at The Connecticut State Veterans Cemetery and five interments were performed at the Colonel Raymond F. Gates Cemetery.

The Connecticut State Veterans Cemetery is projected to reach capacity for the interment of buried cremains in fiscal year 2027-2028 (September 2027). The Department is actively seeking land to establish a new Veterans Cemetery.

Improvements/Achievements for Fiscal Year 2024-2025:

Agency Wide

- Connecticut Veterans Affairs completed its website modernization, which has achieved an initial 96% accessibility rating from the Department of Administrative Services. The website features virtual tours of our Residential Program and Healthcare Center. Additionally, the website boasts an online look-up tool, providing individuals with a user-friendly experience to easily locate Municipal Veteran Representatives and district offices by entering a zip code, town, or using an interactive map.
- In May of fiscal year 2024 – 2025, the agency launched a Progressive Web Application, CT VET, to replace the existing CT Veterans Affairs mobile application. CT VET provides streamlined, one-touch access to crisis support and essential services.
- The agency continues to record its quarterly podcast, CT Vets ConneCT, with



a professional vendor, ensuring the public is well informed concerning variety of Veteran topics including benefits, healthcare, programs and services, key events, legislative, and community partnerships.

- Connecticut Veterans Affairs upgraded its security system with new cameras, hardware, and software to increase safety across the Rocky Hill main campus.
- Connecticut Veterans Affairs established its Veterans Coffee House. The Coffee House is held on the 2nd and 4th Friday of every month and is open to all Veterans. The Coffee House continues to grow in participation with many Veterans from the community attending.
- During fiscal year 2024 – 2025 the agency transitioned to a resilient, cloud-hosted Electronic Health Record (EHR) platform, enhancing system reliability, scalability, and the ability to rapidly integrate new features—ultimately improving Veteran-focused care.

Sgt. John L. Levitow Healthcare Center

- The Healthcare Center's (HCC) clinical focus areas are specific to each Veteran and his or her clinical goals. During fiscal year 2024- 2025, common goals included medication deprescribing, skin integrity, fall risk mitigation, nutrition and weight management, and mental health management and stabilization. Through person-centered and multidisciplinary care planning, the current percentage of individual Veterans receiving antipsychotic medications is 24.7%. Similarly, Veteran use of hypnotic medication at the HCC is 2% compared to the CT average of 5.3%. Additionally, the HCC's use of anti-depressant medication among Veterans is 68%, which is close to the CT average of 54.5% and expected in a Veteran population. All psychotropic medications are reviewed monthly by the Federal VA psychiatrist and the DVA pharmacist for possible dose reduction.



- In June 2025, the HCC implemented a web-based electronic health record system that offers state-of-the-art programming geared specifically to the needs and requirements of a skilled nursing facility. This new health record will create efficiencies in documentation and regulatory compliance.
- The HCC serves as a clinical training site for nursing students from area nursing schools. Additionally, pharmacy students from UCONN School of Pharmacy and Western New England University do a portion of their clinical training in the Connecticut Veterans Affairs pharmacy. During fiscal year 2024 – 2025, the HCC had eleven interns. The agency’s Pharmacy Supervisor, Barbara Fiano, was named “Preceptor of the Year” by UConn School of Pharmacy.

Residential Programs and Services

- Sustainment of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings on the Connecticut Veterans Affairs campus. Meetings are held weekly and are open to the public and Veteran Residents.
- The Residential team re-purposed space within the residential facility to offer a Recreation Department at no cost to the agency. With hard work and vision, the recreation team is now able to create programs for Veterans in a dedicated location, which has brought renewed energy and increased Veteran participation.
- Veterans have access to weekly Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery [CCAR] meetings on campus and are provided with transportation to their preferred location for additional therapeutic offerings.



- The residential program has enhanced their recreation program offering a robust number of activities and events in coordination with other partners and volunteers in the community. These activities and events take place both on and off campus and include programs at the state-funded Easternseals Veterans Rally Point and Hospital for Special Care, where Veterans attend aqua therapy weekly.

Advocacy and Assistance

- Implemented a periodic newsletter (“Veterans Affairs Sends”) to share news and events across the Veteran population. Currently, there are over 700 subscribers to the newsletter.
- Establishment of a Veterans Services Support Center. As part of the Center, OA&A’s District 1 office was moved from Newington to Rocky Hill, significantly improving access to services for Connecticut Veterans.

Veterans Cemetery and Memorial Services

- Cemetery and Memorial Services collected \$354,036.00 in federal burial allowances for the General Fund. Additionally, installation payments for over 581 federal Veteran headstones/foot markers were processed totaling \$87,150.00.

Projects and Operations Division

Projects and Operations oversee facilities maintenance, building services, transportation, environmental management, strategic planning, grant management, and information technology. The division maintains collective responsibility for the three Connecticut Veterans Affairs cemeteries, statewide Veteran Service Officer locations, and the 92-acre main campus in Rocky Hill, which consists of approximately 800,000 square feet of facilities. Projects and



Operations synchronize and coordinate these functions to support the agency's mission. During the 2024–2025 fiscal year, the division achieved the following:

- Renovation of eight buildings to support additional housing for eligible Veterans and their families. This project is an expansion of the Patriots Landing program with the goal of providing up to 46 additional bed spaces. The project is phased, with the first phase projected for completion in Fall of 2025 and the second phase projected for completion in Spring of 2026.
- Utilizing funding provided by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's "Lead by Example" program, Connecticut Veterans Affairs has several projects in progress to improve energy efficiency, lower consumption, and lower emissions of Greenhouse Gases. Projects include steam trap valve replacement (completed), interior lighting upgrades in all buildings (ongoing), replacement of central boilers (ongoing), exterior lighting upgrades (ongoing), and solar panel installation (ongoing).
- Completed capital improvement projects and plans include the upgrade of cameras, the renovation of the Veteran Support Center (Building 18), and the Facility Capitalization 5-Year Master Plan and Information Technology Investment Strategy Plan.
- Information and technology improvements are aimed at streamlining delivery of services to Veterans. IT improvements during the 2024 – 2025 fiscal year include the implementation of an electronic healthcare record (EHR) system, equipping clinical staff with tablets to improve service delivery by expanding mobility and enabling real-time access to patient information, deploying two new mobile audio-visual carts, enhancing communication and training capabilities, and onboarded to the new telework application to submit and review telework requests.



Human Resources Division

The Human Resources (HR) Department is comprised of an HR Business Partner and HR Generalist assigned to Connecticut Veterans Affairs from the Connecticut Department of Administrative Services (DAS). Human Resources assists the agency and its employees by providing specialized functions, including recruitment, staffing, and position management and employee transactions with CORE-CT. Human Resources, in conjunction with Labor Relations, manages all performance and progressive discipline included but not limited to counseling, warnings, suspensions, grievances and/or dismissals. HR also provides guidance to managers and supervisors regarding employee relations. During the 2024-2025 fiscal year, the division achieved the following:

- Established policy changes specific to attendance, which allows for greater clarity for managers on tracking attendance.
- Initiated a new Kronos and Overtime Policy with a revised Overtime Request Form. Updates were created to ensure pre-approval of overtime, fiscal compliance and standardized practices throughout the agency.
- Achieved a 100% attendance rating among Connecticut Veterans Affairs staff to attend a State Ethics training. Training was offered in-person and virtually through Teams or LinkedIn Learning, thus ensuring all staff were able to meet the training requirement.
- In coordination with DAS's EEO Specialist, HR presented a Recruitment Process training to assist managers in identifying all the needed steps in the recruitment process and learning new features of the UKG platform.



Affirmative Action

- The agency’s Affirmative Action Plan was approved by the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities in May 2025 for the biennial year 11/1/2022 – 10/31/2024.

Fiscal Services Division

Fiscal Services division at Connecticut Veterans Affairs supports each agency division by prioritizing expenditures to conservatively manage appropriated resources while meeting the challenges of supply chain shortages and rising costs. Fiscal Services will continue to apply strategic methodologies using a conservative approach to manage resources while fulfilling the core mission of “Serving Those Who Served” strategically and responsibly.

Community Advocacy Division

The Community Advocacy Division is responsible for key functions including the development, planning, coordination, and facilitation of agency events and ceremonies, active engagement with local and statewide community based organizations, serving as the agency’s Public Information Officer (PIO) and principal communications and public affairs lead, serving as the agency’s legislative liaison and point of contact for intergovernmental matters with municipalities, state and federal elected officials and executive agencies at the state and federal level, oversight of monetary donations and distribution of donated funds made to Connecticut Veterans Affairs, coordination of volunteers and volunteer groups, and management of all requests from organizations seeking to utilize the Connecticut Veterans Affairs campus for events and trainings. During fiscal year 2024 – 2025, the Community Advocacy Division achieved the following:



- Coordinated and facilitated eleven (11) one-day volunteer opportunities for community organizations including Cummins and Pratt and Whitney.
- Established a relationship with Rocky Hill Boy Scouts to assist in the completion of an Eagle Scout project, which provided two customized wheelchair-height and accessible garden boxes for the Veterans who reside on the dedicated dementia unit in the Health Care Center.
- Developed and coordinated a Veterans Day reading at Emma Hart Willard Elementary School in Berlin, CT where Commissioner Welch and Governor Lamont spent the morning reading age-appropriate Veterans Day stories to each grade level.
- Continued the agency's official podcast, CT Vets ConneCT, with an additional five episodes, including a special edition during Military Consumer Month in July 2024, which featured information and resources from Commissioner Welch of the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs, Major General Fran Evon of the Connecticut Military Department, Commissioner Bryan Cafferelli of the Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection, and Connecticut Attorney General William Tong. Podcasts have been made accessible via the agency's website and each episode receives over 10,000 listens on the agency's Facebook page.

Special Events

Stand Down 2024:

- Stand Down is Connecticut Veterans Affairs signature event bringing together federal and state agencies, community providers, and Veteran service organizations to provide medical screenings, employment and



education assistance, legal and motor vehicle help, Veterans' benefits information, essential clothing and personal care items, and housing referrals to Veteran attendees. Stand Down 2024 was the fourth consecutive year that the event was held across regional locations. In fiscal year 2024 – 2025, Stand Down successfully added a sixth location in Stamford at the University of Connecticut Stamford. Stand Down 2024 was widely attended with more than 1300 Veterans from across CT attending.

Unclaimed Cremains Military Burial 2024:

- On October 16, 2024, three souls were brought to their eternal resting space at the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown, CT through a dignified military burial service in partnership with the Connecticut Funeral Directors Association and CT Military Department. The ceremony provided the opportunity for these three Veterans to be remembered, recognized, and honored as they were laid to rest among their fellow brothers and sisters.

Wreaths Across America:

- Connecticut Veterans Affairs hosted Wreaths Across America at the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown and the Colonel Gates Veterans Cemetery in Rocky Hill on Saturday, December 14, 2024. More than 200 volunteers placed nearly 14,000 wreaths at the headstones of our Veterans. In partnership with over 950 individual and corporate sponsors, each Veteran laid to rest in our Connecticut State Veterans Cemetery was personally recognized and honored with a wreath placed at his or her headstone.



Veterans Hall of Fame:

- On January 23, 2025, Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs in partnership with the CT Military Department and the Office of Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz inducted fourteen Veterans, including two women Veterans, into the Connecticut Veterans Hall of Fame. The ceremony was hosted on the Connecticut Veterans Affairs campus in the Gold Star Families Memorial Auditorium. The ceremony was open to the public and welcomed over 250 guests. Induction into the Hall of Fame recognizes the impact and inspirational work Veterans have contributed to their communities after his or her military service.

Vietnam and Korean Veteran Ceremonies:

- In conjunction with the Lieutenant Governor's Office, Connecticut Veterans Affairs has been traveling throughout the state honoring Vietnam and Korean Veterans. Vietnam and Korean Veterans are presented with a pin from the DVA and a certificate from Lt. Governor Bysiewicz. During fiscal year 2024–2025, Commissioner Welch participated in over 15 events with the Lieutenant Governor's Office.