



Minnesota Commanders' Task Force 2025 Legislative Priorities

Congressionally chartered veterans organizations in Minnesota working together to pass legislation on behalf of all veterans.



Presentation by Dr Kristy Janigo

Legislative Chair

The American Legion Department of Minnesota



 **AMERICAN
LEGION**

 **VFW**





The American Legion Department of Minnesota

NOTE: THIS YEAR THE CHAIR OF THE COMMANDER'S TASK FORCE IS THE AMERICAN LEGION DEPARTMENT OF MINNESOTA COMMANDER CARL MOON.

About The American Legion:

- “The nation's largest veterans service organization, we relentlessly champion veterans and service members on Capitol Hill, support military families, and are dedicated to preventing veteran suicide.”
- Founded by an Act of Congress after World War I in 1919, The American Legion fiercely advocates for the unique needs of every generation of veterans, service members, and their families who pledge to protect our nation
- The most local entity is a post. Some of our posts have buildings, charitable gambling, a bar, a restaurant. Some have none of these. The statewide entities are called “departments,” thus, we are the Department of Minnesota.

The American Legion Department of Minnesota:

- More than 46,000 members (year to date totals), with 549 posts, organized into 10 districts

The American Legion Department of Minnesota website: Mnlegion.org



**Department Commander
Dr. Carl Moon
2024-2025**



The Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of Minnesota

About The Veterans of Foreign Wars:

- “We trace our roots back to 1899 when veterans of the Spanish-American War (1898) and the Philippine Insurrection (1899-1902) founded local organizations to secure rights and benefits for their service.”
- The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is a national, non-partisan, non-secretarian organization composed exclusively of citizens who have seen "foreign service" in the United States Armed Forces.
- Nationally, they are members of nearly 10,000 posts, located in all States, the District of Columbia, the Canal Zone, France, Germany, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Okinawa, Puerto Rico, Samoa, Taiwan and Thailand.
- The V.F.W. is organized on four principal levels...the Post, District, Department (State) and National. The local unit is the Post. Communities have from one to several Posts. All Posts in one or more counties are in a District, these are under the direct supervision of Departments (State).

The Department of Minnesota, VFW serves Minnesota veterans, servicemembers, their families, and our communities

- More than 21,000 members, 208 posts, organized into nine districts

The Department of Minnesota, VFW website: <https://vfwmn.org/di/vfw/v2/default.asp>



**State Commander
David Staehlin
2024-2025**

Disabled American Veterans



Department Commander
Oather Martin
2024-2025



About Disabled American Veterans:

- “We continue to serve as the official voice of America’s service-connected disabled veterans — a strong, insistent voice that represents all of America’s 3 million disabled veterans, their families and survivors. DAV of Minnesota’s network of services — free of charge to all veterans — is supported by membership dues and charitable contributions from the American public.”
- Another key deliverable that DAV provides is transportation. Each day, a cadre of volunteers drive veterans from their home to medical appointments at no cost to the veteran.

Disabled American Veterans of Minnesota:

- The Minnesota Disabled American Veterans (DAV) is a membership group made up of women and men who have been disabled during their military service.
- Through DAV of Minnesota’s ongoing advocacy and determination, legislation continues to pass that upholds veterans’ benefits and rights. No one knows better about the issues veterans face than veterans themselves.
- Minnesota DAV has more than 19,000 Minnesota members and 39 chapters across the state.

Disabled American Veterans of Minnesota website: <https://davmn.org/>



Jewish War Veterans of the United States

Department of Minnesota

About The Jewish War Veterans:

- “Proudly Serving Jewish Veterans Since 1896”
- Jewish War Veterans of America is an American Jewish Veterans' organization, established in 1896 by Civil War veterans to prove that Jews have proudly served this country since the Revolutionary Era.
- As the oldest congressionally chartered veterans organization, JWV has an estimated 7,000 members nationwide, ranging from World War II to current conflicts and active duty personnel.

Jewish War Veterans of the United States Department of Minnesota

- The Department of Minnesota is comprised of 3 posts: Abrahamson-Biglow-Spector Post 354, Nilva-Dansky-Neff Post 331, and St. Paul Post 162
- MN JWV acts as the voice for Jewish military veterans and as a liaison with other veterans groups.
- “Our mission is to empower veterans with the tools and resources they need to thrive in the civilian world.”

The Department of Minnesota, JWV website: <https://mnjwv.org/>



Department Commander
Stewart Mednick
2024-2025



Military Order of the Purple Heart

About Military Order of the Purple Heart:

- “Our members have all answered our Country's call. Now as Combat Wounded veterans, we proudly continue to serve our country by helping America’s active duty, veterans, her families and those who have borne the burden of battle.”
- Chartered by congress in 1958, The Military Order of the Purple Heart is an organization of military men and women who received the Purple Heart Medal for wounds suffered in combat.
- Their mission is to foster an environment of goodwill and camaraderie among combat wounded veterans, promote patriotism, support necessary legislative initiatives, and provide service to all veterans and their families. Membership is restricted to those wounded in combat; however, they support all veterans with a variety of programs.

Military Order of the Purple Heart Department of Minnesota

- 13 chapters in Minnesota, across 11 counties

Military Order of the Purple Heart Department of Minnesota website: <https://purpleheartmn.org/>

Department Commander
David Bellis
2024-2025

Combat
Action Awards



WWII



Korea



Vietnam



Armed Forces
Expeditionary



Southwest
Asia



Iraq



Afghanistan



Global
War on
Terrorism





American Veterans

About The American Veterans:

- “Formed in 1944, The American Veterans Association (AMVETS) is one of the nation’s foremost veterans service organizations (VSOs).”
- AMVETS national service officers also provide free claims assistance to veterans, their dependents and survivors. We also work to brighten the lives of hospitalized veterans and promote quality-of-life programs, such as Special Olympics. Membership in AMVETS is open to anyone who is currently serving or has honorably served, in the U.S. Armed Forces, including the national Guard and Reserves.

Amvets Minnesota Department

- The Minnesota Department serves all Veterans in the state of Minnesota, and helps connect them with local, state, and federal programs available to them.
- Our mission is to support veterans and active military, provide community services, and preserve freedom.
- We stand as a strong and influential advocate for America’s veterans on important issues such as employment and training, mandatory funding for government-provided health care and other benefits to which they are entitled.
- AMVETS is a 501C 19 organization.

American Veterans website: <https://mn-amvets.org/>



**Department Commander
John Flores, 2024-2025**



Marine Corps League

About Marine Corps League :

- “Founded in 1923, the Marine Corps League (MCL) is an organization that perpetuates the traditions and spirit of ALL Marines and Navy Fleet Marine Forces Corpsmen, who proudly wear or have worn the eagle, globe and anchor of the Corps.
- Our mission is to promote the interest and to preserve traditions of the United States Marine Corps, to strengthen the fraternity of Marines and their families, to serve Marines, Fleet Marine Forces Corpsmen, and Fleet Marine Forces Chaplains, and to foster the ideals of Americanism and patriotic volunteerism.
- The League is the only federally chartered Marine Corps related veterans organization in the country.”

Marine Corps League Department of Minnesota

- In Minnesota, there are 15 detachments across the state.

Marine Corps League Department of Minnesota website: <https://www.mcldeptofmn.org/>



**Department Commander
Andrew Mc Cormack
2024-2025**



Paralyzed Veterans of America

Paralyzed Veterans of America:

- Founded in 1946, the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) is a national organization dedicated to serving former members of the U.S. Armed Forces who have suffered catastrophic paralysis because of spinal cord injury or disease.
- The key objective of the PVA is to take the actions necessary to restore spinal cord injury or diseased victims' bodies and life potentials as closely possible to those not suffering spinal cord dysfunction.
- More than 16,000 members nationally. "As a member, you'll become part of a family of men and women united to improve the world for veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders and all people with disabilities. PVA doesn't charge fees or dues – membership is entirely free!"

Minnesota PVA Chapter:

- In Minnesota, the chapter was granted status in 1993 and currently has over 300 members.

Minnesota PVA website: <https://mnpva.org/>



**President
Vicky Garrison
2024-2025**

CTF partners



Minnesota
Department of Veterans Affairs





Minnesota Commanders' Task Force 2025 Legislative Priorities

Congressionally chartered veterans organizations in Minnesota working together to pass legislation on behalf of all veterans.



Priority 1 - Separate Veterans Omnibus Bill



Pass a clean Veterans Omnibus Bill in the 2025 session. The first Veterans & Military Affairs Omnibus Bill was passed in 2022. This has separated our legislation from partisan trading and should be Minnesota precedent, like an ag bill, tax bill or transportation omnibus bill. We also had our own omnibus bill in 2023-2024. We continue to advocate for our own omnibus bill, so it's abundantly clear what Minnesota veterans want.



Priority 2 – Hunting, Fishing, & Trapping for Veterans

When we look at other states known for their outdoor activities like hunting and fishing, we see benefits intended to show appreciation and get Veteran back to the outdoors. Minnesota has lagged in this area and for over 10 years the CTF has had this as something we would like to see changed to provide our Veterans with similar opportunities.

We ask you to support:

- Change MN DNR's license fees for Veterans 50% or greater service-connection to a greatly reduced cost license (set at the minimum amount for the license to qualify for federal excise funds are \$3).
- Recognize all veterans be recognized in MN by setting the out of state license price for non-resident veterans to the resident license price.





Priority 3 – Modernize the Disabled Market Value Exclusion - Veterans

The exclusion values for disabled veterans and surviving spouses have not changed in over 10 years while home values have dramatically risen, reducing the impact of this benefit. We cannot allow Minnesota veterans to lose their homes as prices continue to skyrocket and the property-tax exclusion benefit becomes less and less effective.

We ask you to support:

- Increase the exclusion amount for 70-100% disabled veterans to \$200,000
- Increase the exclusion amount for 100% permanently and totally disabled veterans to \$400,000
- Index the new values to inflation
- Remove references to honorable character of discharge from the statute.
 - County assessors should not spend time and taxpayer dollars evaluating character of service, or making wrong decisions that remove veterans from benefits.
 - The federal VA has already deemed the character of service honorable for disability compensation purposes.





Priority 3 – Modernize the Disabled Market Value Exclusion – Surviving Spouses

There are several areas of the current market value exclusion statute that are unfavorable to surviving spouses and exclude them from receiving the benefit.

We ask you to support:

- Remove the equal or lesser value language for surviving spouses.
 - It is often more expensive to downsize from a large home that is already paid off to a smaller home, town home, or a condo.
- Remove all remaining time limits for a surviving spouse to apply for the exclusion.
- Allow active-duty spouses to apply for the exclusion when they return to Minnesota, after the death of the veteran.
 - MS 273.13, Subd. 34(d), says the surviving spouse must file within two years of the death and must live in the home at the time of the death. This needs to change.
- Allow surviving spouses to remarry and retain the benefit.





Priority 4 – Minnesota Claim Shark Bill

There is a proliferation of parties advertising their services to advise veterans on VA benefits claims. Some of these parties are not accredited with the VA and charge steep fees for their services which causes financial hardship for veterans in need. County veteran service officers (CVSOs) and other governmental veteran service officers are accredited to file VA benefits claims for veterans, and they will never charge a fee. It should not be too much to parties that charge fees for their services to obtain VA accreditation.

We ask you to support:

- Expand 197.6091 to include VA accreditation requirements.
- Require written fee agreement before parties render veterans benefits services.
 - The agreement must comply with Code of Federal Regulations, title 38, section 14.636, paragraph (g).
- Prohibit guarantees of veteran benefits
- A violation of this section is an unlawful practice under section 325F.69 and a person who violates this section is subject to the remedies provided in section 325F.70.
- Any civil penalty recovered shall be deposited in the Support Our Troops account established under section 190.19.





Priority 5 – Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is a growing problem among Minnesota veterans. In the 2023-2024 biennium, \$540,000 per year in legislative funding to Metro Meals on Wheels addressed this problem in metro areas. However, food insecurity persists in rural and outstate Minnesota. Transportation is an issue, especially for disabled veterans and because of long distances to resources. Many of the food resources are not healthy and are dried or canned goods. Many veterans are also not aware of veteran specific resources available to them, since outreach is lacking in these areas.

We ask you to support:

- Funding of \$500,000 per year to LSS CORE to deliver food insecurity services to areas of the state not currently served by Metro Meals on Wheels.
- Lutheran Social Services CORE already has adequate facilities and production infrastructure and has been delivering these services since 2024. Their program can be scaled up to meet this need in the rest of Minnesota, so all Minnesota veterans have adequate nutrition.





MACVSO
Minnesota
Association of
County Veterans
Service Officers

Presentation by John Baker, J.D.

Executive Director
Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers





- **1943** - County Veteran Service Officers (CVSO) established by MN Statute 197.447
- **1945** - MN Dept of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) and CVSOs came together to form MACVSO
- **1987** - Registered as a Non-Profit
- **2015** - Registered as a 501(c)4





Early Partnership

Get together in 1948. **History:** Most of the first CVSOs were Veterans of World War I, some were combat wounded or gassed and recalled their own struggles seeking benefits and specialized care for their wounds after the war. These newly appointed CVSOs, along with the MN Department of Veterans Affairs (which was formed in 1945), came together to develop standardized procedures for CVSOs, and began what has become a 75-year relationship with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and other partners for the betterment of our Veterans. The organization was called the Minnesota Association of County Veteran Service Officers (MACVSO).





MACVSO

Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers -2021

- MACVSO is governed by an Executive Board which is elected each year at the organization's annual meeting in the fall.
- MACVSO organizes training for its members twice a year, in the spring and the fall





MACVSO Mission & Vision

- **Mission:**
 - Train and educate Minnesota Veteran Service Officers.
 - Positively impact legislation decisions.
 - Establish, maintain or enhance relationships with stakeholders.
- **VISION:** Be the premier support association for our 87 Minnesota County Veteran Service Officers and staff.

Visit macvso.org



What Does MACVSO Provide

- Statewide training for CVSOs.
- Advocate for our CVSOs to our state and national partners.
- Educate our partners on CVSO role and responsibilities.
- Onboard and mentor new CVSOs and Assistant CVSOs (ACVSO).
- Advocate at the State and Federal levels on legislation that benefits Veterans and their families.
- Develop partnerships with Veteran stakeholders.
- Assist our membership in wellness and resiliency.
- Provide technical assistance to our CVSOs.



MACVSO helps form NACVSO

Your
Veterans Benefits
Start in your
home town.

Visit www.nacvso.org to find your
local veteran service officer.



- Formed in 1991
- 36 states have CVSOs
- Provide standardized training
- National legislative advocacy for veterans and the profession



NACVSO's leadership is one of our own

Chris Hinton, Waseca County
Veterans Service Officer

Current NACVSO President





What is a County Veteran Service Officer (CVSO)?

- 1943 - locally funded (county) to assist veterans & family members in obtaining benefits and services accrued/earned through military service
- Minnesota State Statute (197.60) – each county will employ a CVSO
- Must be a “Veteran” to be a CVSO





Listen. Mentor. Counsel. Advise.



CVSO Mission

Provide assistance and support to veterans and their family in obtaining earned veteran benefits through state and federal programs and to act as an advocate on their behalf or direct them to other authorized agencies or providers as needed.



Role of County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO)



- CVSO's work with many organizations:
 - US Department of VA
 - Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)
 - Veterans Health Administration (VHA)
 - Veterans Cemetery Administration (NCA)
 - Minnesota Dept of Veterans Affairs (MDVA)
 - Non-profit veteran help agencies (Every Third Saturday, Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans, etc.)
 - Out of State Agencies

One stop for veterans benefits. CVSOs facilitate progress on any issue.



CVSO Provided Services

- Advocacy for veteran and families
- Information and assistance to organizations furnishing claims assistance to veterans
- Networking with other organizations

- Outreach to hard-to-contact elements of veteran community
- Stand downs / veterans resource fairs
- State fairs
- Media (radio, newsletters, websites, etc.)
- Legions, VFW, funeral briefs
- Re-integrations (Ft Lewis/Ft McCoy)
- Mentoring and counseling
- Referrals



Veterans Benefits

- Disability compensation
- Veteran pension
- Survivor pension
- Dependency & indemnity compensation (DIC)
- VA healthcare
- Combat veteran reintegration
- Dental/optical assistance, Veterans Relief Grant
- Education and training
- Vocational rehabilitation and employment
- Home loan guarantee
- Life insurance
- Re-employment
- State & national cemetery eligibility
- Burial benefits





MACVSO Legislative Platform

Shared priorities with CTF

- Claim sharks
- Modernize the disabled veterans homestead market value exclusion
- Modernize the surviving spouse homestead market value exclusion
- Food insecurity resources for Minnesota veterans

Shared priority with The American Legion Department of Minnesota

- No charge for vehicle registration for Gold Star spouses

Unique priorities for MACVSO

- Technical Assistance Coordinators
- State offset for property tax benefit
- Data sharing between CVSOS / assessor's office
- Remove penalties for veterans unjustly charged for veteran benefits representation



Priority 1 – Technical Assistance Coordinators

- Justice Involved Veterans – Kristy Janigo, Hennepin County
- Suicide Prevention – Tom Anderson, Winona County
- Women Veterans – Jenna Schmidtke, Faribault County



KRISTY JANIGO



TOM ANDERSON



JENNA SCHMIDTKE



Priority 1 – Technical Assistance Coordinators

Additional expertise is needed for County Veterans Service Officers to fully serve women veterans, prevent veteran suicide, and support justice involved veterans. The Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers can more thoroughly distribute institutional knowledge across its membership with the use of technical assistance coordinators. However, for the technical assistance coordinators to be effective, they need access to training to deepen their expertise. They also need to be able to travel to other counties to provide assistance to the counties.

We ask you to support:

- Under 197.608 Veterans Service Office Grant Program, increase the annual grant for The Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers by \$60,000:
 - \$20,000 is for the women veterans technical assistance coordinator
 - \$20,000 is for the veteran suicide prevention technical assistance coordinator
 - \$20,000 is for the justice involved veterans technical assistance coordinator





Priority 2 – State Offset for Property Tax Benefit

In Minnesota, there are approximately 23,000 households currently receiving the disabled veterans and surviving spouse homestead market value exclusion.

We ask you to support:

An offset, so the state shares the burden in administering this benefit and reimburse the counties up to 25 cents on the dollar.





Priority 3 – Data sharing between CVSO / assessor's office

It is necessary for a county's property tax assessment office and county veterans service office to share data in annual verifications of eligibility for the Minnesota property tax exclusion for veterans and surviving spouses and other veteran benefits. If reviewing the law at face value, it appears the sharing is only one way, CVSO to assessor. In our experience, it is not in the best interest of veterans, if assessors are not permitted to share information with CVSOs. We have had county assessors refuse to share data back with CVSOs.

We ask you to support:

- Revise 197.603 DUTIES Subd. 2. Records to permit county assessors to share data with CVSOs.
- “Subd. 2.Records; data privacy. Pursuant to chapter 13 the county veterans service officer is the responsible authority with respect to all records in the officer's custody. The data on clients' applications for assistance is private data on individuals, as defined in section 13.02, subdivision 12. The county veterans service officer may disclose to the county or local assessor private data necessary to determine a client's eligibility for the veteran with a disability homestead market value exclusion under section 273.13, subdivision 34. Likewise, the county or local assessor may disclose private data to the county veterans service officer to assist the veteran or surviving spouse with a homestead market value exclusion under section 273.13, subdivision 34.”



Priority 4 – Remove penalties for veterans unjustly charged for veteran benefits representation

The law should not penalize veterans who are taken advantage of or misled in the pursuit of veteran benefits. Currently 197.604 language states any person who pays CVSO staff for services in securing benefits may be subject to a gross misdemeanor. This does not seem in line with the spirit of the law, which is to hold government employees who charge fees unlawfully accountable. This statute could be improved by simply striking the below four words.

We ask you to support:

- Revise 197.604 UNLAWFUL TO PAY FEE. Subdivision 1. Payment of fee.
 - “It shall be unlawful for ~~any person to pay~~ any county veterans service officer or any employee under the officer or for any county veterans service officer or employee under the officer to receive any fee directly or indirectly for any service rendered in securing any benefit referred to in section 197.603.”



THANK YOU! Questions?

John Baker
Executive Director
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Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers