



City of
Melrose
MASSACHUSETTS

VETERANS SERVICES

Roseann Trionfi-Mazzuchelli
Director of Veteran Services
Melrose, Wakefield & Saugus

Milano Senior Center
201 W. Foster Street
Melrose, MA 02176

P: 781-979-4186/4187

E: RMazz@CityofMelrose.org

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

TO: Melrose City Council

FR: Roseann Trionfi-Mazzuchelli, Director of Veteran Services for Melrose, Wakefield, Saugus (MWS)

RE: Veteran Services Budget for FY25

@: 25 April 2024

Honorable City Councilors: As your Veteran Services Director I am respectfully submitting a summary of my FY25 Budget.

Veteran Services had an increase in our Veteran Benefit line to accommodate the 3.2% COLA increase for Social Security. We hired a part-time VSO in order to make our District compliant with the Executive Office of Veteran Services (EOVS), formally known as, Department of Veteran Services (DVS). That VSO departed after several months for personal reasons. On April 29th, 2024, another part-time VSO will be starting in the Melrose office.

With the recent passing of some major legislation, the PACT Act (Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022), and several other Acts which will pass in the next several months, (HERO Act, Panama Canal Act, and more) which was signed into law on 10 August 2022, but not implemented until January 2023, this office, along with other VSO offices have greatly increased their case-load. In Melrose alone, I have prepared, completed, and submitted an average of 7 claims per week. These claims take several hours to do. If the Veteran passed due to his/her illness they got because they served in an area related to any areas under the PACT Act, or the other Acts that are due to pass soon, then their surviving spouse and or surviving disabled children or parents are eligible for benefits. Their claims take twice the time as the Veterans claims as we must connect the Veteran's death posthumously to the presumptive health conditions along with applying for the family member's claims. Since the passing of the PACT Act alone, over 1.3 million claims have been filed with the VA thus far, with about an additional 1 million claims still waiting to be heard. The numbers keep growing as the VA hasn't been able to hire enough staff to handle this work-load.

The Director's salary is paid by the three cities/towns with each paying a third. Part of my duties as the Director is to oversee the other towns, with the heaviest caseload currently here in Melrose. This Director takes on their VA Cases and spends a day in each of their offices on a weekly basis to assist them.

All three towns have approximately the same population, yet Wakefield and Saugus have only part-time VSOs and part-time shared administrative assistants who primarily do the MUNIS part and some of the OnBase. Our primary function is to assist and advocate for all Veterans, and their families. Chap. 115 Benefits is at the top of the list of the many duties.

This office works closely with the volunteer Melrose Veterans Advisory Board, with COL Robert Driscoll as the Chairperson. The Board has several funds attached to it: Relief Fund, Monument/Memorial Restoration

Fund, and Trip to DC Fund. This Board sponsors all the Veteran related events in Melrose including a Food Drive (2 X per year) in partnership with Shaw's Supermarket of Melrose, which supports our local Food pantries, as well as honoring our Veterans at the Knoll with Dedication Bricks for Veterans Day and Memorial Day. This year we received over 70 brick requests. The VAB also conducts the replacing and adding of Flags at all Veteran graves and a Flag Retirement Ceremony at the conclusion of collecting and placing of the grave flags. The Melrose Administrative Assistant handles the brick orders as well as paying all the bills from this department.

Additionally, all three offices participate, with Melrose as the Lead, in a monthly Veterans Food Bank where we have over 200 participants. North Andover and Stoneham also participate with this monthly Food Bank. Melrose's Administrative Assistant handles all the reports related to this, managing the many volunteers as well as setting up and breaking down the Food Bank at Memorial Hall. Food Bank day starts at 6:00 am and ends at approximately 4 pm, once deliveries to house-bound clients are done. Food Bank day is important as it's a way to conduct well-being checks on our homebound Veterans/family members.

We do home visits for the Veterans who aren't mobile. We also participate in school related activities revolving around Veterans. The Melrose Middle School hosts a breakfast and a Veteran Assembly twice a year for Veterans/family members.

Our Chap. 115 Clients have reduced due to the VSOs actively seeking federal funding resources to provide more financial stability to the Veteran/family.

Thank you,

Roseann Trionfi-Mazzuchelli

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