



Commission on Veterans Affairs
Testimony on FY 25 Operating Budget
April 8, 2024
Wayne Miller, Chair

The Commission on Veterans Affairs wishes to thank the residents of the County and the County Council for their combined support for Veterans over the past 16 years for funding programs that benefit the quality of life for Veterans and their families. We recommend the following:

1. **Vouchers for Homeless Veterans and their Families** - We commend the County for making a priority of the addition of permanent affordable housing for the homeless veteran population. HUD-VASH is a collaborative program which pairs HUD's Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) rental assistance with VA case management and supportive services for homeless Veterans. However, not all Veterans qualify due to receiving less than an honorable discharge and are therefore not eligible for VA programs. The County has appropriated \$650,000 per year for this effort and recommends this funding continue. For Veterans who do qualify for VASH vouchers, the Commission was recently informed by Senator Van Hollen's office that the County has been awarded an additional 20 VASH vouchers bringing the total to an estimated 118. In partnership with the Commission, Senator Van Hollen's, and Senator Cardin's office the County received 98 VASH vouchers between the years of 2010 - 2016 years and now in 2024 an additional 20 vouchers, each worth \$13,122 or \$1.5 M total per year in housing subsidies.
2. **Serving Together** – The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) provides funding for Serving Together programming through a Behavioral Health & Crisis Services (BHCS) General Funds/based budget contract. Contractual services were originally funded, in FY11, by a Community Grant award. We recommend that the County continue to fund this source of funding in FY2024 of \$171,865 with a recommended increase of 3% to an estimated \$177,000 in FY 25 that provides needed referral resources for Veterans and their families.
3. **Warrior Canine Connection** - According to the VA, the PAWS Act is an “unfunded mandate”. Therefore, WCC needs help to provide these services for Veterans both locally and nationally. Once again, the impact WCC has on the Veteran community merits approval of the \$50,000 Community grant from the County. In addition, the Commission will continue to:
 - Promote community outreach efforts with the media to educate on the many Veteran programs and services. We especially thank Barry Hudson and Neil Greenberger of the Public Information Office for their strong support in promoting and recognizing the services and sacrifices of our Veterans and their families.
 - Promote suicide prevention awareness and promote resilience by Advertising Psych Armor and encourage individuals to enroll in the free trainings.
 - Participate in Operation Green Light activities and celebration of Veterans Day.
 - Promote social connectedness. and veteran inclusion in County activities.
 - Enhance economic opportunities, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship training for veterans.
 - Work with the Council on the proposed legislation for property tax credits for Veterans

In conclusion, again thank you for your continued support. I look forward to your questions.