

2021 POLICY BRIEF



Authorize Resources for County Veteran Service Officers

ACTION NEEDED:

Urge your members of Congress - especially those who serve on the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees – to reintroduce and pass the *Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach Act*, which would authorize federal funding to expand and strengthen County Veteran Service Officers (CVSOs)

BACKGROUND:

CVSOs are local county employees who are nationally accredited by the VA to prepare, present, and prosecute U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) claims. Often, CVSOs are veteran's first point of contact in the community for accessing services. CVSOs assist veterans in accessing a range of benefits, including service-connected benefits, enrollment in VA health care, VA home loans, education benefits and available job placement assistance. Veterans are not always aware of the benefits available to them, and CVSOs are often the first to inform them about their eligibility.

CVSOs operate in 36 states and perform much of the VA's legwork for filing claims in their counties. In fact, CVSOs are responsible for helping veterans obtain more than \$50 billion annually in federal health, disability, pension and compensation benefits. Though CVSOs' primary focus is helping veterans navigate the federal benefits system, these offices are currently funded almost entirely by counties, which creates challenges for areas with high demand or counties that serve veterans in rural areas. There is currently no federal funding directly available for CVSOs.

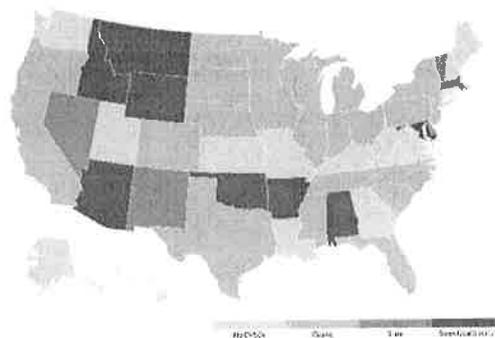
THE CVSO ACT:

The *Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach (CVSO) Act*, last introduced by Reps. Mike Levin (D-Calif.) and Gregory Steube (R-Fla.) and Sens. Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.) and Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska) during the 116th Session, would offer federal funding for CVSOs for the first time. The *CVSO Act* would authorize \$50 million annually for five years to expand and support CVSOs or similar local entities. The VA would award competitive grants to CVSOs, through the states, to create, expand, or support programs that promote health and wellness.

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Map: 2017 CVSO Status by State



Source: National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO)

prevent suicide and reach veterans who need help navigating the often-burdensome VA process.

Under the bill, states would submit an application containing a detailed plan for the use of these funds, demonstrating that the dollars will not supplant current state or local funding. The legislation would also direct the VA Secretary to develop guidance for outcome measures to determine the effectiveness of the programs. The new personnel resources outlined under the *CVSO Act* would enable counties to better meet the needs of local veterans. States without CVSOs would also benefit under this legislation, as it would allow the VA Secretary to partner with state, local or tribal entities to improve service delivery.

The creation of a new federal funding stream for CVSOs is especially critical during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a significant economic impact on county finances across the nation.

KEY TALKING POINTS:

County Veteran Service Officers (CVSOs) are local county employees who are nationally accredited by the VA to prepare, present, and prosecute U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) claims

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Though CVSOs' primary focus is helping veterans navigate the federal benefits system, these offices are currently funded almost entirely by counties, which creates challenges for areas with high demand or counties that serve veterans in rural areas

The *Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach (CVSO) Act* would authorize \$250 million over five years in federal competitive grant funding to expand and support CVSOs or similar local entities

The new personnel resources outlined under the *CVSO Act* would enable counties to better meet the needs of local veterans and are especially critical given the impact of COVID-19 on county finances

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