

**TRINITY COUNTY GRAND JURY  
2004-2005**

**HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE  
FINAL REPORT**

**VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE**

**This Report was Approved  
May 3, 2005**

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HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE  
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**VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE  
REVIEW OF CITIZEN'S COMPLAINTS**

**PURPOSE:**

The Grand Jury is charged, by law, to periodically review all management and operations of County offices. One area of such a review is the Veterans Service Office.

**BACKGROUND:**

There are approximately 2055 registered veterans in Trinity County that are dependant on the Veterans Service Office for information, aid and guidance. This includes, but is not limited to, filing for benefits, claims, insurance, pensions, etc., for both veterans and their dependents. Out of the 2055 registered veterans in Trinity County, 343 of these veterans are receiving disability pensions.

**METHOD OF INVESTIGATION:**

Interviews with Veterans Service Office Department Head, Brian Muir; Veterans Service Office Representative, Jay Bevard and complainants. Information was also taken from a current report from the local Veterans Service Representative, Jay Bevard, to the Board of Supervisors.

**FINDING 1:**

Part time Veterans Service Office, at present, leaves veterans unable to depend on and have access to the Veterans Service Office. From complaints received, we found the lack of availability of this department to cause a hardship to veterans who sometimes travel a great distance to find the department closed on the days it's advertised as being open. We also received complaints that correspondence was not always responded to. Following are some direct quotes from complainants as to solutions to the problems.

- 1. ANSWER THE PHONE DURING BUSINESS HOURS.**
- 2. IF A VETERAN ASKS FOR AN APPOINTMENT, GIVE THE VETERAN AN APPOINTMENT.**
- 3. AT THE TIME OF THE APPOINTMENT, HEAR THE VETERAN OUT. DON'T TRY TO SECOND GUESS.**
- 4. ONCE HAVING DETERMINED THE VETERAN'S NEEDS, PROVIDE ASSISTANCE. TRUE, ANY ONE PERSON DOING THIS JOB MAY NOT KNOW HOW OR WHAT TO DO TO ASSIST. AT THAT POINT, PICK UP THE PHONE OR WRITE TO THE VA AND FIND OUT.**

## **5. TREAT EACH VETERAN WITH CONSIDERATION AND RESPECT. THIS MEANS ALL VETERANS.**

Some of these problems are possibly due to the lack of time by the part time Veterans Service Office Representative.

Information from the report to the Board of Supervisors states that veterans benefits come in many forms, including disability compensation for service connected and non-service connected disabilities, health care, vocational rehabilitation, burial allowances, dependent and survivor compensations and college tuition waivers for dependents. According to the Veterans Administration, about one-third of the nation, which includes dependents and survivors may be eligible for Veteran Administration benefits and services.

Perhaps more veterans would be processed in Trinity County if this department was open full time. Mr. Bevard stated in his report to the Board of Supervisors, that some Trinity County veterans apply for benefits in Humboldt and Shasta counties. Our understanding is that Trinity County receives it's funding partly from the state, determined by the veteran population in each particular county. It seems that if veterans are applying in other counties, Trinity County is losing money and this could very likely be being caused by the inability of access to the current Veterans Service office hours.

Mr. Bevard's report also stated that Trinity Countys veterans now receive benefits totaling 12.6% versus 11% state average. In Fiscal Year 2003-2004, Trinity County veterans obtained the highest "one time benefit", statewide.

### **RECOMMENDATION 1:**

Trinity County should hire a full time, five day a week, Veteran Service Officer and give him/her Department Head status, thus eliminating Brian Muir's position as Department Head and relieving him of additional responsibilities.

### **FINDING 2:**

According to our interview with Mr. Bevard, as of this date, there is no county transportation or time available for the Veterans Service Office to transport veterans to and from the Veterans Adiminstration Clinic in Redding, Ca.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2:**

Assign the Veterans Service Office a vehicle or access to a vehicle through a motor pool with a designated, specific one day per week, month or as needed, to transport veterans to and from the Veterans Administration Clinic in Redding. This office would be closed on that specific day each week or month and all veterans would be informed of that particular day. This would eliminate the unnecessary travel for veterans when the office was closed, as well as assisting veterans with transportation to the Clinic for those who needed it.

**CONCLUSION:**

Due to findings 1 and 2, the 2004-2005 Trinity County Grand Jury feels it would be beneficial to the county to accept these recommendations.

<u>ENTITY</u>	<u>FINDING</u>	<u>RECOMMENDATION</u>	<u>RESPOND IN</u>
Trinity County Board of Supervisors	1,2	1,2	90 days
Veterans Service Officer	1,2	1,2	60 days
County Counsel	1	1	60 days