

TO: The Honorable Anthony C. Edwards, Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
FROM: Trinity County Board of Supervisors
SUBJECT: Response to Recommendations of 2004-2005 Grand Jury Health and Human Services Committee Final Report – Veterans Service Office
DATE: September 7, 2005

The Grand Jury Health and Human Services Committee, has requested a written response to their final report on the Veterans Service Office. The Trinity County Board of Supervisor's response is as follows:

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 compensation 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 County's 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.

Response: Agree in part. There were certainly time and budget constraints on this position that limited the effectiveness of services delivered, although the Board of Supervisors believes that Mr. Bevard performed quite admirably under those constraints.

Recommendation #1: *(1) Trinity County should hire a full time, five day a week, Veteran Service Officer and give him/her Department Head status, (2) thus eliminating Brian Muir's position as Department Head and relieving him of additional responsibilities.*

Recommendation #1:

1. Has been implemented. The Trinity County Board of Supervisors would first like to thank Jay Bevard for his rejuvenation of this position. The Auditor / Controller with the assistance of other county personal and at the direction of the Board of Supervisors recruited and hired a new Veteran's Service Officer. On July 19, 2005, the Board of Supervisors made the status of this position a full time position.
2. Will not be implemented. The Board of Supervisors did not eliminate the Auditor/Controller's authority as Department head over this position since we did not believe that to be a sound organizational change at this time. Very little reference was made in the Grand Jury Report as to why it would be beneficial to eliminate the Auditor/Controller as the department head for the Veterans Service Officer other than it would relieve him of additional responsibilities. The Board of Supervisors would request that the Grand Jury be more detailed in explaining their reasoning the next time they make this kind of recommendation so that the Board of Supervisors can completely understand the background for that recommendation.

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 Administration Clinic in Redding, CA.

Response: Agree in part. There is no *specific* county transportation available for the Veterans Service Office to transport veterans to and from the Veterans Administration 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.*

Recommendation #2: Will not be implemented. As stated above, there is no specific county transportation available for the Veterans Service Office to transport veterans to and from the Veterans Administration Clinic in Redding, CA. This does not mean that transportation arrangements could not be made on a case by case basis, but the Board of Supervisors does not believe that the Veterans Service Office should necessarily, physically, provide those services themselves. Certainly there are options of working collaboratively with other agencies or individuals to help fulfill the transportation needs of veterans in Trinity County. If transportation is a need for veterans within the county, we should be working that into our discussion of public transit solutions including Trinity Transit, ridesharing and the county motor pool in addition to other transportation solutions. The Veterans Service Office is just one of (and probably not the most effective) many ways to transport veterans to the clinic in Redding.

The Board of Supervisors would like to thank the Grand Jury members for their continued good work.

TO: The Honorable Anthony Edwards, Presiding Judge of the Superior Cou

FROM: Brian Muir, Auditor / Controller

CC: Kelly Frost, Deputy Clerk-to-the Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT: Response to Recommendations of 2004-05 Grand Jury Report RE: Veteran's Service Office – Review of Citizen's Complaint

DATE: July 1, 2005

Although the Grand Jury Health and Human Services Committee did not request a written response from me to their final report on the Veteran's Service Office – Review of Citizen's Complaint, I am providing a response in my capacity as the Supervisor of the Veteran's Service Representative as follows:

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.*
- 6. 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 County's 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.

Response: I agree in part. As with any office open only part time there are access problems for citizens. However, the finding implies that the Veterans' Services Representative

has not been responsive to the needs of County veterans. In fact, the opposite is true. Jay Bevard has done an outstanding job of doing outreach to insure veterans are aware of all benefits available and have assistance in completing the appropriate applications. His efforts are the reason that Trinity County veterans obtained the highest one time benefit statewide in Fiscal Year 2003-2004.

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.

Recommendation #1: Implementation of the recommendation is a decision of the Board of Supervisors. The County should hire a full time veterans' services representative if funding permits. I will include that recommendation as part of the Fiscal Year 2005-2006 budget discussions. In addition, I have requested that the County Personnel Department survey other small counties to determine if our salary for the position is competitive. I disagree that the position should have department head status. There is no need for the County to incur the additional cost of department head benefits for an individual who would not even be supervising other employees. At this time, since I am a veteran, I perform the duties of the veterans' services officer at no cost to the County. If the Board of Supervisors chooses to have another department head assume those responsibilities, there are other County department heads that are veterans and would do a fine job.

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 Administration Clinic in Redding, California.

Response: I disagree. The veterans' services representative's job is to advise and assist veterans in qualifying for any available benefits. He or she can not do that if they also need to perform work as a transportation aide. There is transportation assistance available for medical appointments through Human Response Network.

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.

Recommendation #2: The recommendation will not be implemented.

At the request of Jay Bevard, the veterans' services representative during the Grand Jury's review of this matter, I am including his response to the Grand Jury's report as an integral part of my response.

Our veterans deserve the best assistance the County can afford, and I will continue to support those efforts.

To: Brian Muir, Veterans Service Officer

This is a response to the Grand Jury Final report of 2004-2005:
Citizen's Complaint

In response to the single alleged citizen's complaint and all references made thereto, the Veteran complainant had previously exhausted all available benefits due from the V.A. This was evidenced by an independent investigation by a V.A. Field Examiner who met in person with the Veteran and by the V.A. Pension Center Caseworker. Both had thoroughly examined the case and both found this particular Veteran to be in current receipt of ALL entitlements; entitlements that were filed by this office. This was told to the Grand Jury, and in spite of my efforts to provide this individual with service and information, the Grand Jury obviously decided prior to our meeting that I should have provided private transportation from Wildwood to Redding and beyond; regardless of established duties and responsibilities of the County Veterans Service Office purpose and intent; not to mention available resources.

This Same Veteran and the Grand Jury Report alleged that the Veterans Service office phone is never answered, the office is un-staffed during stated office hours, Veterans are "Second guessed before hearing them out," complex issues are not properly researched and Veterans are disrespected. Yet there is not one Veteran able to substantiate any such claim other than the aforementioned Veteran. The facts are to the contrary, in lieu of any temporary power failure, the phones have always been answered in person or by a phone message recorder that has always been updated and operational. Changes in offices hours are religiously posted at the office and on the recorder. To insinuate that I would 'second guess' any Veteran or show disrespect is contrary to my personal motivation for performing this job; a job I perform at great personal expense. If the issue of 'second guessing' is as a result of the aforementioned Veterans complaint, it was only due to inadequate information written on piece of scrap paper, which I initially received more than six months after its postmark. I responded by mail with the basic application for all V.A. benefits, whereupon I received additional worthless information. I then informed the Veteran of hours and places of a special Outreach Program nearer her residence allowing for a one on one consult. I was again subjected to additional libelous remarks, which concluded any further contact. I later learned from certain Grand Jury members that she also uses another name; the same members who were appalled by the living conditions of this Veteran and insinuated it to be my responsibility.

In respect to the Grand Jury's Recommendation I:

I agree this department should expand to a full time status with a Department Head Status. However, removing Brian Muir as Department head appears to be more of a personal attack rather than an unbiased recommendation expected from a Grand Jury. For the record, if it wasn't for Brian Muir this office would not exist and I wouldn't of been able to accelerate the program to the levels achieved in the past two years. However, the real issue is financial, and such decisions are charged to the Board of Supervisors. I will also state for the record that a commensurate pay scale for this position should be closer to \$50,000 per year, as apposed to the below poverty threshold level established by HUD currently being paid.

In respect to the Grand Jury's Recommendation #2:

I believe the Grand Jury's recommendation of Veterans Services becoming a personal "Taxi

Cab" for Veterans is so ridiculous it brings into question the Grand Jury's understanding the County Veterans Services Program and the practical application of assets. However with such a recommendation, would this include the higher pay scale between Transit Driver and CVSO?

In conclusion, Trinity County has the highest population of Veterans per capita. They all deserve the respect and admiration and assistance in obtaining their entitlements. Because of the current system, Veterans benefits and entitlements require competent representation to assist in the complexities of the bureaucracy; Yes, Veterans Services should be expanded, but to accept this report as any facsimile of fact would be an absurdity that would only add credence aberrant behavior and diminish the respect due to the credentials of the Grand Jury.

Respectfully submitted,

Jay Bevard
Veteran Services

TO: The Honorable Anthony C. Edwards, Presiding Judge of the Superior Court

FROM: Jeanette Palla, County Counsel

SUBJECT: Response to Recommendations of 2004-2005
Grand Jury Health and Human Services Committee Veteran's Service Office Final Report

DATE: July 15, 2005

The Grand Jury Health and Human Services Committee has requested a written response to their final report on the Veterans Service Office. In my capacity as County Counsel, my response is as follows:

Response: County Counsel was asked to respond to this Grand Jury Report. Penal Code 993(a) provides that reports may be submitted for comment to responsible officers, agencies or departments, including the Board of Supervisors.

County Counsel has no authority to make decisions on whether a county employee position should be full-time or part-time, or whether an employee should be granted Department Head status. Nor does County Counsel decide whether an employee should be assigned a vehicle to transport community members. These type of decisions rest with the supervisor of the employee, the Department Head or the Board of Supervisors.

Accordingly, I have no comment regarding either of the findings or recommendations.