



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SB 574 – Native American Veteran Income Tax Settlement Fund

Native Americans who served on active duty in the United States military and were domiciled on tribal land had state income taxes withheld from their military pay. The New Mexico State Legislature has created a fund to pay out settlements to the veterans and their immediate families who were impacted by this and infused \$1,000,000 into this fund. Further funding was made available during the 2011 Legislative Session in the amount of \$250,000. The Department of Veterans' Services, the Department of Taxation and Revenue, and the Indian Affairs Department have partnered to continue dissemination of information to every Pueblo, the Navajo Nation, and the two Apache Tribes.

As of June 30, 2012, NMDVS has processed over 1500 applications. It is the responsibility of our agency to verify that the applicants are in fact veterans or the surviving family members of veterans. We also must verify that the veteran was domiciled on Tribal Lands while they were on active duty. Once we have verified this information, the application is then forwarded to the Department of Taxation and Revenue for verification that there were state income taxes that were withheld from their military pay.

The Department of Veterans' Services continues to work with tribal officials and the tribal Veteran Service Officers to ensure that information is being placed in the hands of the local veterans and their family members.

The Department has established contacts with local media outlets on the Navajo Reservation as well as media outlets that serve the Apache Nations and the Pueblos along the Rio Grande Corridor. With each media blast, our department sees an increase of applications flowing in.

Representatives from our department have been invited by local tribal officials to meet with the veterans in their local areas, and we continue to hold information meetings. Currently, the NMDVS has planned information meetings in Zuni at the request of one of their Tribal Counselors. We are also planning additional meetings in Jicarilla, Mescalero, as well as with the Eastern Navajo Veterans Organization in Crownpoint.

Native American Tribal Service Officer Training

The Field Division of the Department of Veterans' Services is hosted the biennial Tribal Service Officer Training to continue informing the local Native American Tribal Service Officer in new information concerning veterans benefits, both on the federal and the local level.

Each Service Officer received their certificate of completion at the end of the training seminar.

The Department has fully trained 28 Native American Veteran Service Officers from 11 communities to serve their local veterans. These Service Officers were trained in all aspects of compiling a claim for disability, pension, education, housing as well as filing for all state benefits.

This program has allowed NMDVS to reach out to the local Native American veteran in a custom and a language that they are comfortable with.

AGENCY OVERVIEW / BACKGROUND

Mission Statement

To assist veterans, their widows, and their children in establishing the privileges which they are legally entitled.

Agency Overview

The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services was elevated to a cabinet level agency by Governor Richardson in 2003 giving New Mexico's veterans a top level agency to address their needs. Governor Martinez subsequently appointed Mr. Timothy Hale as the Cabinet Secretary of the Department in January 2011, and as a combat veteran who served during the Operation Iraqi Freedom, Mr. Hale brings a sense of duty that he passes on to each employee. Mr. Hale's goal is to make the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services the premier veterans' service provider and advocate in the nation.

The Department's motto "Serving Those Who Served", has been a commitment carried out by every employee of the department as we strive to continue to honor and serve those who have "put on the uniform" to defend our country. With more than 180,000 veterans in the state, NMDVS has continued to advocate for veterans who have earned the right to collect state and federal benefits, and NMDVS wants to make sure they receive everything they are entitled to. Veterans have earned our gratitude and respect. Their health care needs, educational and training needs, their need for affordable housing, jobs, and long term care, their quality of life needs, as well as their right to an honorable burial are what drive the department's actions.

The Department of Veterans' Services is committed to exceeding the service expectations of New Mexico's veterans and their families.

AGENCY EFFORTS TO IMPLEMENT POLICY

Cabinet Secretary Timothy Hale has formally requested meetings with the leadership of the Navajo Nation and has already met with the All Indian Pueblo Council to inform their leadership on the Native American Tax Settlement Fund, the Tribal Service Officer Training, and the Veteran Business Outreach Center's plans to develop a Native American Veteran Owned Business Outreach plan.

Deputy Secretary, Alan Martinez has also been invited by Eastern Navajo Veterans Organization to present information to their members regarding all state and federal veterans benefits.

CURRENT AND PLANNED PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FOR AMERICAN INDIANS / ALASKA NATIVES

Outreach

The Department of Veterans' Services is currently working on a plan to further outreach to the Native American Veteran community through town halls and informational meetings throughout Native American Country.

This plan includes requesting formal meetings with the Presidents of the Jicarilla and Mescalero Tribal Officials in ways to better serve the veterans in their local area. We are currently working on details for a benefits seminar to be held at Mescalero. NMDVS plans to include representatives of the Veterans Administration Regional Office in Albuquerque, the Veterans Administration Medical Center, as well as therapists from the Vet Center in Las Cruces to provide information to all veterans and specifically to those veterans who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Business Outreach

The New Mexico Veterans Business Outreach Center's mission is "To assist veterans in realizing their entrepreneurial goals." To accomplish that mission, VBOC participates in events targeting a variety of specific groups of veterans. Following are Native American-specific activities in which VBOC has been engaged so far in CY 2012.

Native American Business Conference; 22-24 May at the Isletta Hard Rock Conference Center. VBOC maintained a booth at the event and interviewed numerous Native American veterans. One particularly interesting idea was a young Navajo man who wants to explore purchasing a Dollar Store franchise to begin locating the outlets throughout the Navajo Reservation.

The Tribal Leaders Summit; 7-8 June at the Inn of the Mountain Gods near Ruidoso. VBOC Director Joseph Long attended as the DVS representative and interacted with a number of the tribal leaders. The governor of the Acoma Pueblo expressed a desire to host a "VBOC on the Road" event.

Procurement Technical Assistance Program (PTAP) Native American Event; 17 July at Gallup. VBOC Director Long gave a half hour presentation.

VBOC Director Long and Veteran Business Advisor Joshua Baca have had individual counseling sessions with ten Native American veteran entrepreneurs.

TRAINING AND EMPLOYEE NOTIFICATION

The Department of Veterans' Services has appointed Deputy Secretary Alan Martinez as the tribal liaison to act as the point person to handle the STCA training.

Mr. Martinez will handle the employee notification for the rest of the employees with the agency.

KEY NAMES AND CONTACT INFORMATION

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Agency Tribal Communication Policy

Native American veterans have long been underserved as a population. The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services has undertaken a concerted effort to reach out to these veterans. Native American veterans have historically been one of the lowest minorities to take advantage of their veterans' benefits, both state and federal. The Department strives to address the reasons why Native American veterans do not seek out these benefits and has made a goal of reaching these veterans in their own communities. The Department has decided to take the information to the veteran instead of waiting for the veteran to come to us.

Informal Contact

The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services employs Veteran Service Officers in or near every Native American Community in New Mexico. These Veteran Service Officers do itinerant travel to every Pueblo, the Navajo Nation, and both Apache Tribes to serve veterans in those communities. The Veteran Service Officer contacts the Tribal Leadership to let them know when he will be in their communities and where they will be located to service veterans and their families.

Formal Contact

In the event that a formal contact with Tribal Leadership is required, the Office of the Cabinet Secretary will communicate with the Tribal Leadership of the perspective tribe or nation.