

Senate panel approves two Van Drew measures on veterans health care

TRENTON — The Senate Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee approved two bills sponsored by state Sen. Jeff Van Drew aimed at addressing obstacles to health care faced by veterans.

The bills would provide funding to ensure appropriate transportation for veterans traveling to VA hospitals, and to prevent residents of state-operated veterans' nursing homes from having to pay for transportation to medical appointments outside the facility.

"One of the major issues for veterans living in South Jersey is that they must travel for hours to get to VA hospitals for care, and for those who suffer from debilitating conditions, the trip can be excruciating. One of the most painful challenges we've heard is that some of the elderly veterans make this trip without timely access to restrooms. We have to do better," Van Drew said. "We've been advocating for a pilot program in our area that will allow veterans to be treated by community hospitals, with the care covered by the VA. Absent an approval by the federal government of the program, we have to take steps at the state level to improve circumstances for our residents. This bill is not the answer, but it is a way to address the current problem faced by veterans until we reach the broader goal."

The first bill (S2594) would require the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs to create a program to provide state funding to counties and municipalities to provide transportation services to veterans that require transport to a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs medical center or facility. Under the bill, counties and municipalities receiving funding would provide for the transportation of veterans, on vehicles furnished with functioning

bathroom facilities, to the nearest VA medical center. A county or municipality receiving aid could also incorporate the funding into an existing transportation service operated to provide transportation services to veterans in accordance with this bill. The bill appropriates \$500,000 for the purpose of providing grants to counties and municipalities to purchase vehicles having functioning bathroom facilities to provide transportation services to veterans.

A second measure (S2592) would provide state funding to support the cost of transportation to doctor's offices for residents living in state-operated veterans' nursing home facilities. Van Drew introduced the legislation after the state Department of Military and Veterans Affairs began enforcing a policy in which residents living in these facilities who choose to see an outside doctor — in cases where the veterans' home has a physician available to provide the medical care in-house — are charged a fee for transportation to the office. Under the bill, funding for transportation would be provided by the state Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs through appropriations for the operation of each of the state's three long-term care nursing homes for veterans and their spouses, located in Paramus, Menlo Park and Vineland.

"This bill will provide the funding necessary to reinstate free transportation for veterans at the Vineland facility and the other two veterans' homes in the state," Van Drew said. "These are men and women who have fought for our freedoms and now are depending on us to ensure they get the right care."

The bills were approved by a vote of 5-0. They next head to the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee for consideration.



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Honoring our nation's heroes

Above, U.S. Coast Guard Training Center Cape May commanding officer Capt. Owen Gibbons addresses the crowd on Veterans Day in Cape May. At right, a bugler plays Taps. Below right, the Coast Guard Color Guard. Below, students from Maud Abrams School. At bottom, the honor guard fires a salute.



Coalition to fight homelessness

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"over the hurdle."

Cohen said they help ward off eminent utility shut-offs or provide a down payment to have utilities restored if they have been shut off and help the client get on a payment plan.

Last Christmas a client had just started a job but had no money to buy presents for his child.

"A couple of the members, out of their own pocket, provided toys and gifts for the little girl," she said.

A focus of CVAC is providing transportation to make sure clients can get to medical appointments. She said Burke Motor Group held a fundraiser and provided a van that is in the ownership of the DAV.

"Because the van is privately owned and not

owned by the VA, we have control over where we can take that van and the kind of trips we can do and we're allowed to have the client bring a loved one with them, which is not something they can do on the VA van," Cohen said.

CVAC is constantly undertaking outreach to veterans so they are aware of benefits they are entitled to and how to apply for those benefits. The committee is also involved in preventing homelessness for veterans.

"We are helping folks who are in eminent danger of losing their residence because they've fallen behind on the rent or mortgage, and we can often help them over that hurdle so that they can again get back on a level playing field," she said.

CVAC members include

the Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, DAV, Vietnam Veterans of America as well as health care agencies, Cohen said.

"A lot of our administrative expense is actually borne privately by the agencies sitting at the table," she said. "In our case, 100 percent of the money we take in goes directly to client systems."

CVAC was started by Cohen and Senior Vice Commander Johnnie Walker of DAV Chapter 44. She said the committee from its start wanted to address basic emergency needs, "very much a Red Cross philosophy."

"What do you need to sustain you today, tomorrow and maybe the next day while you're trying to work out a plan?" she said. Carol said they provid-

ed a suit and a haircut for a client going on job interviews and pots and pans for someone setting up housekeeping.

What leads to a veteran becoming homeless? Cohen said Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, mental health and substance abuse issues and lack of employment opportunities and affordable housing in Cape May County contribute to homelessness.

For more information, see CVAC's website cvac-capemay.com, call (609) 646-8330 or email cvac-capemay@gmail.com.

The public may contribute to CVAC via its website.

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TIDES : November 2016

DATE	HIGH		LOW	
	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
16	8:50	9:21	2:15	3:08
17	9:42	10:17	3:08	4:03
18	10:37	11:17	4:03	5:00
19	11:35		5:02	5:59
20	12:20	12:36	6:04	7:00
21	1:26	1:39	7:09	7:59
22	2:30	2:41	8:14	8:55
23	3:28	3:38	9:16	9:46

MOON PHASES
Last quarter, Nov. 21 • new moon, Nov. 29

Cape May Star and Wave

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