

NEW COMMISSIONER ORIENTATION MANUAL

INTRODUCTION

You now have an opportunity to assist your fellow veterans, please make the most of it. Iowa's veterans are one of the State's most valuable assets. No one has done more for the State of Iowa and our country's security than our veterans. Iowa has been on the forefront of every war, conflict, and skirmish that this Nation has encountered. In order to show its appreciation for the sacrifices that the veteran/dependents have made, in 1874 the State of Iowa established a Veteran Assistance Program. In 1927, the Veteran Assistance Program was renamed the Iowa Bonus Board. Through the efforts of the Bonus Board, the Iowa State Association of County Commission of Veteran Affairs was organized in 1937. The sole purpose of this Association is to see that veterans should not be in want by insuring that adequate aid is provided for the veteran/dependent in times of need. You are now a part of this rich heritage as a member of your County Commission of Veteran Affairs. Again, welcome and thank you.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality and a veteran's right to privacy is a high priority to your County Commission of Veteran Affairs. Information obtained from or about the veteran must be kept in strict confidence.

ESTABLISHING THE COMMISSION

Chapter 35B of the Code of Iowa created a Veterans Affairs Commission for each county. **Chapter 35B** gives Iowa's county Board of Supervisors the authority to establish a County Commission of Veteran Affairs. Once Commissioners are appointed, the State Code states:

35B.3

County Commission of Veterans Affairs. The county Commission of Veterans Affairs shall consist of either three or five Commissioners, as determined by the Board of Supervisors, all of whom shall be veterans as defined in section 35.1. If possible, each member of the Commission shall be a veteran of a different military action. However, this qualification does not preclude membership to a veteran who served in more than one of the military actions.

35B.6 Qualification — training — offices

1. a. The members of the Commission shall qualify by taking the usual oath of office. The Commission shall organize by selecting one of the Commission members as chairperson and one as secretary. The Commission, subject to the annual approval of the Board of Supervisors, shall employ an executive director or administrator who shall have the power to employ other necessary employees to carry out the provisions of this chapter, including administrative or clerical assistants, but no member of the

Commission shall be so employed. The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) shall recognize the executive director or administrator as a County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO) pursuant to 38 C.F.R. §14.628(c) for the purposes of assisting veterans and their dependents in obtaining federal and state benefits. The Commission shall recommend the compensation of the executive director or administrator and all employees of the office to the Board of Supervisors. The Board of Supervisors shall consider the recommendation and shall determine and approve the compensation of the executive director or administrator and all employees of the office. The executive director must possess the same qualifications as provided in section 35B.3 for Commission members. However, this qualification requirement shall not apply to a person employed as an executive director prior to July 1, 1989.

b. The Commission may employ an administrator in lieu of an executive director. Administrators shall not be required to meet all the qualifications provided in section 35B.3 for Commissioners. An administrator may hold another position within the county or other government entity while serving as an administrator only if such position does not adversely affect the administrator's duties under this chapter.

c. Upon the employment of an executive director or administrator, the executive director or administrator shall complete a course of certification training provided by IDVA pursuant to section 35A.5. If an executive director or administrator fails to obtain certification within one year of being employed, the executive director or administrator shall be removed from office. IDVA shall issue the executive director or administrator a certificate of training after completion of the certification training course. To maintain certification, the executive director or administrator shall satisfy the Continuing Education Units (CEUs) established by the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO). Failure of an executive director or administrator to maintain certification shall be cause for removal from office. The expenses of training the executive director or administrator shall be paid from the appropriation authorized in section 35B.14.

d. The duties of the executive director or administrator and employees of the county office shall include all of the following: (1) Inform members of the armed forces, veterans, and their dependents of all federal, state, and local laws enacted for their benefit; (2) Assist all residents of the state who served in the armed forces of the United States and their relatives, beneficiaries, and dependents in receiving from the US Veterans Administration and any state benefits of any and all compensation, pensions, hospitalization, insurance, education, employment pay and gratuities, loan guarantees, or any other aid or benefit to which they may be entitled under any law; (3) Complete and submit all forms required for federal, state, and county benefits.

e. There is no charge to the veteran and/or their dependents for any of these services.

2. a. Two or more county Board of Supervisors may agree, pursuant to chapter 28E, to share the services of an executive director or administrator. The agreement shall

provide for the establishment of a Commission of Veterans Affairs office in each of the counties participating in the agreement.

b. Neither a county Board of Supervisor nor a county commission of veteran's affairs person shall publish the names of the veterans or their families who receive benefits under the provisions of this chapter.

3. a. Each county commission of veteran affairs shall maintain an office in a public building owned, operated, or leased by the county.

b. The hours of operation of each county's veterans affairs office shall be posted in a prominent position outside the office entry door.

35B.7 Meetings — report — budget

The Commission shall meet monthly and at other times as necessary. At the monthly meeting the Commission shall determine who are entitled to county benefits and the probable amount required to be expended. The Commission shall meet annually to prepare an estimated budget for all expenditures to be made in the next fiscal year and certify the budget to the Board of Supervisors. The Board may approve or reduce the budget for valid reasons shown and entered of record and the Board's decision is final. [C97, §432; S13, §432; C24, 27, 31, 35, §5390; C39, §3828.057; C46, 50, 54, 58, 62, 66, 71, 73, 75, 77, 79, 81, S81, §250.7; 81 Acts, ch 33, §6] C93, §35B.7 2014 Acts, ch 1116, §44; 2015 Acts, ch 29, §8 Section amended 35B.8 Accounting system.

35B.16 Markers for graves

The county commission of veteran affairs may furnish a suitable and appropriate marker for the grave of each veteran, as defined in section 35.1, who is buried within the limits of the county. The marker shall be placed at the individual's grave to permanently mark and designate the grave for memorial purposes. The expenses shall be paid from any funds raised as provided in this chapter.

35B.19 Burial records

The executive director or administrator shall be charged with securing the information requested by the US Department of Veterans Affairs of every person having a military service record and buried in the county. Such information shall be secured from the funeral director in charge of the burial or cremation and shall be transmitted by the funeral director to the county's veterans affairs office of the county where burial or disposition of cremated remains is made. This information shall be recorded alphabetically and by description of location in the cemetery where the veteran is buried or the place of disposition of the cremated remains of the veteran. This recording shall conform to the directives of the state Department of Veterans Affairs and shall be maintained as a permanent record by the executive director or administrator.

The executive director or administrator must complete certification/accreditation training provided by the state Department of Veterans Affairs (**35A.5**). Failure to comply and maintain certification shall be cause for removal from office.

A county's population determines office hours:

1. A Commission with a county population of 30,000 or less must be open for a minimum of 20 hours per week.
2. A Commission with a county population of more than 30,000, but less than 60,000 must be open for a minimum of 30 hours per week.
3. A Commission with a county population of 60,000 or more must be open for a minimum of 40 hours per week.

If two or more counties decide to share the service of an Executive Director or Administrator, the Commission must be established in each participating county and the office must be open for the number of hours listed above.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE COMMISSION

The Commission is responsible for the execution of **Chapter 35B, Code of Iowa**. The Commission is responsible for the formulation of **POLICY** and the establishment of the **BUDGET**. The Commission **MEETS MONTHLY OR AT ANY TIME DEEMED NECESSARY** to review expenditures, formulate new ideas, update policy, review state and federal veteran legislation, interview clients on appeal, sign applications to the Iowa Veterans Home, implement new ideas, receive input from county veterans, veterans organizations, and the public or any other matter pertinent to the veteran or commission.

Open Meetings Law

Iowa Code: Chapter 21.2 definitions state that a board, council, commission or other governing body expressly created by the statutes of this state or by executive order must comply with the open meetings law. A board, commission, or other governing body must provide a minimum of 24 hours notice; hold an "open session", record the time, date, members present, votes taken, and enough information to indicate the vote of each member present at the "open session". These minutes shall be public record.

Commission Meetings

1. Will be conducted with an awareness of Robert's Rules
2. Will start at the pre-scheduled time
3. Will be conducted in a professional manner
4. Will follow the agenda
5. Will allow each commissioner to be involved in discussions and decision making
6. Will encourage each commissioner to be on a commission committee
7. Will end each meeting by giving each commissioner the opportunity to address any issue they deem important

Commission Self-Assessment

The Commission is responsible for having an annual self-assessment of the Commission. This self-assessment will aid the Commission in determining if the Commission is fulfilling its obligation under **Chapter 35B, Code of Iowa**. The assessment will also help individual members come face to face with his/her role as a commissioner.

Executive Director or Administrator Evaluation

The Commission is responsible for establishing an evaluation process setting the standards by which the executive director or administrator is evaluated. This process will aid the Commission in determining program progress of the executive director or administrator for salary recommendations.

Acknowledgement

Commissioners must always remember that the Commission is a team and should function as a team. All matters that concern the Commission shall be placed on the Commission's monthly agenda for full disclosure and discussion before any action is taken. An individual commissioner cannot make a commission decision or represent the Commission unless such representation is voted on and approved at an open meeting by a quorum of the Commission.

It is also important to remember that the Commission is a semi-autonomous body. This means that the Commission does not stand alone in all of its operation. The county Board of Supervisors provides for the budget, housing the staff of the Commission, physical maintenance of all equipment, telephone service, personnel office, health insurance, life insurance and payroll.

COMMISSION ADMINISTRATIVE COMPONENT

Executive Director/Administrator

Confidentiality and a veteran's right to privacy is a high priority to the staff of the County Commission of Veteran Affairs. Information obtained from or about the veteran will be kept in strict confidence.

The executive director or administrator is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the County Commission of Veterans Affairs. **Senate file 2134 section 35B.6** specifically states the following:

"d. The duties of the executive director, administrator, and employees shall include all of the following:

1. Inform members of the armed forces, veterans, and their dependents of all federal, state, and local laws enacted for their benefit.
2. Assist all residents of the state who served in the armed forces of the United States and their relatives, beneficiaries, and dependents in receiving from the United States and the State of Iowa of any and all compensation, pensions, hospitalization, insurance, education, employment pay and gratuities, loan guarantees, or any other aid or benefit to which they may be entitled under any law". (S.F. 2134 section 35B.6)

The executive director or administrator, who is to be nationally accredited, is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the County Commission of Veterans Affairs. The executive director or administrator has a number of duties which include but are not limited to, giving direction to office staff, which could include a nationally accredited service officer, an administrator assistance and an office associate. The executive director or administrator is also responsible for attending meetings on matters pertaining to the veteran and/or Commission, interacting with the public, media, local, state and federal legislators, monitoring the Commission's budget, making policy recommendations, hearing appeals, keeping the Commission informed about the effectiveness of their policies, and also social and economic trends affecting veterans and their dependents.

The Executive Director/Administrator is also responsible for the administration of Service Work and Monetary Assistance, which are the two divisions of the administrative component of the Commission:

Service Work

The first division is service work. Service work is the filing of any and all federal forms for the veteran/dependent to obtain federal or state benefits. There are hundreds of forms that may be filed. Some examples of the benefits available are:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Compensation benefits | 5. Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) |
| 2. Non-service connected benefits | 6. Vocational rehabilitation |
| 3. Widow's benefits | 7. Nursing home benefits |
| 4. Education benefits | |

Much of the office staff's time is spent assisting veteran's with service work. Service work is a priority of the office staff. Millions of dollars of benefits are received by veterans/dependents in the county each month. This money greatly enhances county and state commerce. Once a veteran/dependent starts receiving compensation/pension or vocational rehabilitation benefits, it helps to stabilize the Commission's budget.

Monetary Assistance

The second division of the administrative component is monetary assistance. Monetary assistance includes, but is not limited to the following:

1. Shelter
2. Utilities
3. Food
4. Clothing
5. Medication
6. Eye glasses
7. Dental assistance
 - a. dentures
 - b. extractions
 - c. fillings
8. Hearing aids
9. Burial assistance

It is also the intention of each county Commission of Veterans Affairs to examine any veteran's emergency needs.

IOWA VETERANS HOME

The Iowa Veterans Home was founded in 1887 and is currently the third largest state-owned nursing facility for veterans in the nation. Any honorably discharged veteran and his/her spouse who demonstrates either medical or financial need, and meets entry requirements may apply for admission. The Iowa Veterans Home is located on a 150 acre campus in Marshalltown, Iowa. The Home provides professional care for a veteran and his/her spouse in a friendly environment with a caring staff. The staff of the County Veterans Affairs Commission will assist the veteran and his/her spouse in making application.

IOWA VETERANS TRUST FUND

The State of Iowa has established a Veterans Trust Fund to further assist veterans defined under **Iowa Code section 35.1** as residents of Iowa who served the armed forces of the United States, completing a minimum of 90 days of active duty or who has been discharged for injury before 90 days. The staff of the County Veteran Affairs Commission is responsible for assisting veterans in filing for Trust Fund assistance.

IOWA VETERANS CEMETERY

The staff of the County Commission of Veteran Affairs informs veterans/dependents and acts as a referral agency in assisting veterans/dependents in applying for burial at the Iowa Veterans Cemetery.

The Iowa Veterans Cemetery's operational standards are set by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA). Eligibility is determined as follows:

1. Discharged from "active duty" under conditions other than dishonorable, or died while on "active duty", or served at least 20 years in the National Guard or Reserves and qualified for military retirement pay (or would have qualified except death occurred before age 60). Reserve component personnel qualify if they

otherwise served in a Presidential call up during their reserve component of military service. Active duty for training of reserve component personnel does not qualify as active service.

2. Iowa residency is not required for burial in the Iowa Veterans Cemetery.
3. Veterans can pre-register for burial determination.
4. Funeral directors are required to submit an Application of Interment (submitted at the time of need).

APPEALS

If a veteran/dependent disagrees with a decision made by the county's executive director/administrator/service officer, the veteran/dependent can appeal the decision to the county Commission of Veterans Affairs. The Commission's decision is final. The Commission meets on a monthly basis.

COMPLAINTS

If you have an individual who has a complaint, we have a complaint system in place. The complainant can stop by or call the office to receive the complaint form, or have it mailed to them. Any client who has a complaint, has the right to have the complaint addressed by the executive director /administrator. If the complaint is not resolved, the complainant has the right to have the complaint addressed by the county's Commission of Veteran Affairs.

QUESTIONS...???

When you have questions about any aspect of the Commission, please feel free to contact the executive director/administrator to clarify. When you are asked a technical question by a veteran/dependent or the public that you do not feel comfortable answering, please refer these questions to the executive director/administrator or staff. Always remember that it is okay to say that you do not know. The following are a few of the most commonly asked questions:

? Is the Commission federally funded? Answer NO.

? Am I eligible for assistance with rent? Answer (You will have to contact this office and make an appointment, then eligibility can be determined).

? What federal benefits am I eligible for? Answer (Please contact the office).

COUNTY POLICIES

The Commission shall review all county policies enacted by the Board of Supervisors to determine their affect on the operation of the Commission under **Chapter 35B, Code of Iowa**.

HEALTH INSURANCE PORTABILITY ACCOUNTABILITY ACT (HIPAA)

Each county department, board or commission must adhere to all policies and procedures. Policies and procedures must be reviewed annually to insure that all general requirements of HIPAA are met. Specifically:

1. "Ensure the confidentiality, integrity and the availability of all electronic protected health information (EPHI) the county creates, receives, maintains or transmits.
2. Protect against any reasonably anticipated threats or hazards to the security or integrity of such information.
3. Protect against any reasonably anticipated uses or disclosures of such information that are not permitted or required.
4. Ensure compliance with the security standards identified in the HIPAA regulations.

ORGANIZTIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Board of Supervisors

- Appoints Commissioners
- Allocates budget
- Provides office space

Veterans Affairs Commission

- Budget oversight
- Sets veterans affairs commission policies
- Personnel policy
- Public relations policies

Executive Director/Administrator/Office Staff

- Department Head
- Budget management
- Staff management
- Daily operations
- Public Relations/Outreach
- Service and relief processing
- Claims processing
- Expense accounting
- Administrative functions
- Suggestions/Comments