

Winter 2024 WNC Chapter Newsletter
State Legislature
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Happy 2024! Lots to inform so I will do my best to give a synopsis of what we see as being important to veterans for the upcoming short state legislative session. As a reminder, our state general assembly works in a two-year cycle, with a long and a short session. The short session coinciding with elections. As you can assume, most of the heavy legislative lifting is done in the long session; the short session limited to bills that were approved by either the House or the Senate. Of course, exceptions exist, mostly associated with budget corrections or emergency considerations. As mentioned in the fall 2023 newsletter, only six bills associated with veterans fit the criteria for consideration during the short session, none would make a significant impact.

One of the Department of Military and Veteran Affairs (DMVA) responsibilities is to run the NC Veteran's State Home program which provide skilled nursing care. There are currently five locations around the state, Salisbury, Kingston, Black Mountain, Fayetteville, and one that just opened in October 2023 in Kernersville. Funding and oversight are managed and approved by the state legislature. Medicare, VA, insurance, and other funding support the program and the medical care is contracted in a 5-year increments, currently awarded to Pruitt Health. The NC Dept of Health & Human Services inspects to ensure standards are being met and/or exceeded.

The background above is important because at the end of November 2023, a structural assessment of the Fayetteville home was made and determined to require significant infrastructure repairs costing over ~\$20 million. Sadly, even if those repairs would be made, the ground is unstable and future infrastructure issues would develop, so a decision was made to close the Fayetteville home by 1 February 2024. A new state home, in Fayetteville on stable land will be needed. Originally a 150-bed home, maintenance concerns previously had closed a wing limiting the home to 85 beds. At the time of writing this newsletter 30 veterans still need to be provided a new skilled nursing care home. Sadly, some of the DMVA verbal promises to the veterans that are being displaced haven't materialized. Senior leadership initially promised that the DMVA would cover any increased nursing care costs and help with wait list issues due to the short notice displacement. Hopefully, those promises will be forthcoming, and we will be able to report a better response in a future newsletter.

Within the State Legislative Short Session, they can deal with emergency budget issues. The emergency closing of a 150-bed veteran state home fits that category. Just as the WNC Chapter had board elections this fall, the NC MOAA Council of Chapters (COC) also had its board elections. Of consequence to this article is that Tricia Vinson has been elected as one of two VPs of Advocacy (state & federal) which connects your chapter to the state level advocacy. She also retains her position representing MOAA on the NC Veterans Council (NCVC) which connects all the Veteran Services Organizations (VSO) so they can speak with one voice as needed. The MOAA NCCOC has already voted to support and prioritize their state advocacy efforts for the short session towards the Fayetteville veteran state home replacement. This normally takes 1/3 state funding, 2/3rds federal funding; although we believe we have found ~\$21Million in federal

funds already on hand that could be redirected by state legislative approval towards this effort. Lots of work ahead by all the VSO state legislative team representatives.

One issue we are aware of that needs to be resolved by the DMVA dates to the 2021-2022 state legislative session. In the appropriations, the legislation oversight directed the DMVA to write a report that would be used to develop a state-wide long-term plan due in spring 2022. They were given \$250,000 and directed to work with the Department of Health & Human Services to assess long care needs, current homes, services, wait lists, in coming and out going costs as well as partnership opportunities. Veteran demographics, satisfaction surveys, etc. were also part of the list of requirements with updates provided annually. From our researching, that report was never prepared, with specific NC information, with only generic VA reports provided instead. We have heard they are currently working on that report. That is an issue that will need to be resolved between the state legislature and the DMVA, but we recognize the potential impact to any effort to rebuild the Fayetteville Veterans State home. Hopefully the long-term plan can be developed concurrently with the rebuild of the Fayetteville Veterans Home and maybe the visibility of this effort will provide a positive result.

We want you to be aware of our efforts, of what is happening to the veterans' home in Fayetteville and to gain your support if we need it with our state legislators. We want to support our fellow veterans; ensure they have a strong voice within our state legislature and know we speak as a veteran family across the whole state of NC. This is an election year, and we have brothers and sisters need and a goal to initiate a replacement home in Fayetteville.