

## Wangen, Lonnie L.

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**From:** Wangen, Lonnie L.  
**Sent:** Monday, June 19, 2017 1:31 PM  
**To:** Wangen, Lonnie L.  
**Subject:** NDDVA Budget changes

**Importance:** High

All,

The 2017 65<sup>th</sup> Legislative session resulted in significant budget cuts for the North Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs (NDDVA) for the 2017-2019 biennium. The budget ended with:

- Budget at 77% of base funding. Staffing at 60%.
- Loss of two Full time Equivalent (FTE) staff members.
  - FTE1: CL0033 Office Assist. III      Position #: 00003131      Vacant (Peggy Swisher)
  - FTE2: CL0041 Admin Assist. I      Position #: 00003129      Joanne Rivera
- Loss of Temporary staff funding
  - Highly Rural Transportation Grant (HRTG) coordinator (Laurie Vagts)
  - Could result in additional Funding loss and/or 3rd FTE loss

The 2017-2019 budget begins July 1, 2017

We want you to be aware of the cuts and the changes.

## **Some Programs and Services Affected:**

### **VSO training events**

NDDVA training events will need to be cut back to within our new budget restraints. Basically we do not have the funding for the four training events over the next 2 years. Since the NDDVA staff and Commissioner agree that this is one of the most important parts of our mission, we are meeting with the North Dakota Veterans Service Officers Association leadership prior to and during the Fall CVSO conference to discuss the training plans for the next two years. Discussions have already started and it is our hope to have answers by the end of the fall 2017 VSO training in Fargo.

***\*Expect significant changes. Allow us time to address this issue properly.***

### **Stand Downs**

- No funding support for these events
- Limited or no NDDVA staff support for these events

### **Resource books**

- Veteran data base and resource book-will be discontinued
- Veteran Service Officer Directory-will be discontinued
- Refer to NDDVA website, internet and other resources to compile this data

### **Informational/benefits brochures**

- Will no longer be produced

- Utilize website, internet and other resources

### Mail

- NDDVA will reduce to bare minimum any use of postage by utilizing;
  - ND State secure file transfer
  - Scanning directly into Vetra Spec (for VSO's who have the state program)
  - Fax machine
    - NDDVA main office 701-239-7165
    - NDDVA VA Regional Office: 701-451-4674
- NDDVA will no longer have a Post Office Box All mail should be sent directly to Main office or VA Regional office
  - NDDVA Main Office: 4201 38<sup>th</sup> Street SW #104, Fargo ND 58104
    - Lonnie Wangen
    - Bryan Watters
    - Cathy Halgunseth
  - NDDVA State Approving Agency: 4201 38<sup>th</sup> Street SW #206, Fargo ND 58104
    - Chris Kratochvil will return spring of 2018
    - John Johnson until spring 2018
  - NDDVA VSO's at regional office:
    - Mike Conklin VAMC/RO Suite 209, 2101 North Elm Street, Fargo ND 58102
    - Calie Lindseth VAMC/RO Suite 211, 2101 North Elm Street, Fargo ND 58102
    - Tom Webb VAMC/RO Suite 208, 2101 North Elm Street, Fargo ND 58102

### Calls to main office and VARO office

- Please use direct lines to the VSO or staff members you wish to contact. Emails are best.
- Leave messages as our phones are ringing all day and we cannot answer them all
- We will return message as soon as possible

### ***Expect delays***

### Discharges DD214

- NDDVA will no longer be receiving paper DD214 and DD215 discharge documents from DOD
- NDDVA will no longer be obtaining list of returning veterans
- NDDVA will no longer be providing welcome home letters with benefits, VSO contacts etc.
- Requests for copies of DD214 or other discharges from NOK, VSO's, funeral directors etc. will need to be sent to CVSO/TVSO's first.
  - Requests made to NDDVA for these documents must be submitted to the NDDVA Veterans Benefits Specialists via email, fax or phone call
  - CVSO/TVSO's who do not have signed MOA's for these documents will need to submit
    - Complete and signed SFN 54412
    - Proof of identity of requester
    - If requesting for NOK
      - Death certificate
      - Proof of NOK relationship
- ***Expect significant delays in responses.***

### Burial benefits: headstones and markers

- On behalf of CVSO/TVSO's NDDVA staff will no longer;
  - Process and submit Applications for Headstones and Markers
  - Maintain a Data base of headstones and markers applied for
  - Follow up on missing, incorrect or not received headstones or markers

- All of the above will be the full responsibility of the County and Tribal Veteran Service officers. If you need training on how to conduct these applications please contact our office.

**Website development.** Will be stagnant for a while. If you see broken links or items that need to be added please forward to NDDVA staff and we will address as time allows.

- State heroes page is not complete.
  - If you find a missing veteran that belong there send request to commissioner to add.
  - All but WWI and WWII are completed. About ½ of the WWI and WWII are entered.
  - County information is not complete
- News and newsletters will be significantly reduced.
- NDDVA will attempt to keep social media going as this is very beneficial to veterans, time efficient and inexpensive

**Research and statistics**

- No resources will be expended in this area

**NDDVA Grant applications:**

With NDDVA no longer having the staff (CL0041 Admin Assist. I) to concentrate on processing grant applications the following changes will need to be implemented:

- CVSO/TVSO's will need to ensure that only COMPLETE applications are submitted to NDDVA for consideration
  - NDDVA will no longer reach out to veteran or eligible dependent for additional information or clarification on applications.
  - Any missing or further information that is needed will be sent to the CVSO/TVSO submitting the application on behalf of the veteran/eligible dependent for follow up.
- NDDVA will no longer research additional or alternative resources to ensure the veterans or eligible dependent get all the help they need.
  - This will be the responsibility of the CVSO/TVSO assisting the veteran/eligible dependent
  - CVSO/TVSO will need to contact or refer the applicants to alternate and complimentary resources such as Medicare, dental grants, community action, SSVF, Salvation Army, VA, USDA, etc.
    - These resources have been provided to you in the past and are located on the NDDVA website as well as the individual organizations websites.
- Grant deadlines:
  - Grant recipients have a deadline to gain the services and have the vendors bill NDDVA.
  - Grant recipients will need to ensure that the deadlines are met or file a request for an extension to the NDDVA, through the CVSO/TVSO assisting them.
  - Extensions must be filed prior to the grant deadline.
  - Grants not completed by deadline will be cancelled.
    - It is the County/Tribal VSO's responsibility to work with the grant applicants and their vendors to ensure the services are acquired and billing submitted timely and prior to grant deadline.
- ***Expect delays in Grant application approvals and responses***

**Veteran Aid Loan Applications:**

With NDDVA no longer having the staff (CL0041 Admin Assist. I) to concentrate on processing loan applications the following changes will need to be implemented:

- CVSO/TVSO's will need to ensure that only COMPLETE applications are submitted to NDDVA's for consideration
  - NDDVA will no longer reach out to veteran or eligible dependent for additional information or clarification on applications.

- Any missing or further information that is needed will be sent to the CVSO/TVSO submitting the application on behalf of the veteran/eligible dependent for follow up.
- An updated cash asset form has been uploaded on the NDDVA website. This new form must be the one used.
- NDDVA will no longer research additional or alternative resources to ensure the applicants get all the help they need.
  - This will be the responsibility of the CVSO/TVSO assisting the veteran/eligible dependent
  - CVSO/TVSO will need to contact or refer the applicants to alternate and complimentary resources such as Medicare, dental grants, community action, SSVF, Salvation Army, VA, USDA, etc.
    - These resources have been provided to you in the past and are located on the NDDVA website as well as the individual organizations websites.
- Loan past due payments:
  - Loan recipients have must maintain good timely payments.
    - NDDVA will still mail past due notices.
    - NDDVA will not have the resources to make personal contacts per telephone or email.
    - Delinquent loans will be sent to collections as per policy.
- ***Expect delays in processing loan applications.***

#### **License plate applications**

- Applications for Gold Star Family License plates, POW, and Purple heart plates need to be sent to NDDVA Main office for processing
- ***Expect delays***

#### **Highly Rural Transportation Grant (HRTG) Program**

- NDDVA's budget calls for \$100,000 of Federal HRTG funds to replace \$100,000 of NDDVA staff salary expenses.
  - NDDVA has requested ND Attorney General's Office and VA Office of General Council (OGC) to review the legality of this mandate.
    - Response from VA OGC has not been received at this time.
    - ND Attorney General's Office awaits the response of VA OGC
  - The HRTG funding is based on Federal Fiscal Year (October 1, 2016-September 30, 2017)
  - NDDVA state budget is based on state fiscal year (July 1, 2015- June 30, 2017)
  - NDDVA will need to replace that funding as of July 1, 2017 unless a determination which would alter that mandate is made by June 30, 2017.
- Result of the above:
  - NDDVA's HRTG coordinator position will no longer be funded.
    - Laurie Vagts (HRTG Coordinator) will work until June 30, 2017
  - Program day to day operations will fall to NDDVA Staff.
  - ***Expect delays.***
- Program could lose funding and be cancelled

#### **Services to Veterans on Campus**

- This project will be delayed significantly. However this is a very important project which too many man hours already committed and too much of a negative effect if it is not completed, so we will continue the course but at a much slower pace. It is our hopes that our stakeholders will continue with us toward our common goal.

#### **Veterans Court**

- Will continue to assist in this area. Will not be expanding as planned.

#### **Outreach and Support**

- NDDVA staff and Commissioner will not have resources to attend and support the majority of these events.
- Women Veterans Outreach events will be discontinued

- Women Veterans newsletter will be discontinued

The above are just some of the programs we have identified as being affected by the budget and staff cuts. This is in no way an all-inclusive list as we expect to identify unforeseen changes as we move into the next budget cycle.

We ask for your patience and support as we prioritize and re-adjust programs due to this loss of resources. The NDDVA staff is committed to ensuring we do the best with the resources we have.

Sincerely,

Lonnie Wangen  
Commissioner  
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