

Legislative Report 8-3-2023

Walter Paul

As Vice Chair of the MVLC I briefed the Interim House & Senate Military/Veterans Affairs committee:

On 6 July 2023 at the Community Center in Angel Fire NM the Interim Joint House & Senate Military/Veterans Affairs Committee met. The meeting started at 0930 Chaired by Rep Harry Garcia, Co-Chair Sen Harold Pope. Other Committee members present were:

Rep Eliseo Lee Alcon, Rep Art De La Cruz, Sen Shannon D. Pinto, Rep John Block, Rep Stephanie Lord, Sen Michael Padilla, Rep Andrea Reeb and Rep Debra M. Sarinana

MVLC was third on the Agenda and my testimony started at 1000.

I provided the handouts (attached) and my business card to each member.

I briefed our 3 legislative priorities.

1. The Fix to the Military Retiree Tax Exemption - add Surviving Spouses and eliminate the sunset.

The committee were all in favor of reintroducing these fixes in 2024 - however Sen Pope said that they may consider "extending" the sunset first in order to give it time to show if the current legislation is increasing military retirement in NM. I responded by pointing out that when potential retirees look at the current law in place and see it only has 3 years left that is not motivating.

During my testimony I mentioned that in 2023 the Governor regrettably line item vetoed the provisions to Fix the Military Retiree Tax Exemption. I further stated that the Governor also vetoed legislation for a study in 2021 concerning the impact of Military Retirees on NM - a study that members of the committee had given up some of their discretionary funds to fund. I went on by saying that in 2021 the MVLC sent a letter to the Governor asking for her support and asking for a meeting with her and her staff. I told the committee that to this day we have not received a response to our letter.

I provide Rep Garcia with a copy of the letter and a copy of the USPS signed return receipt (confirming that someone in the governor's office signed for the letter).

2. Potential Conflict between HJR05 & HJR06 - If passed by voters in 2024 HJR05 increases the Veterans Property Tax Exemption from the current \$4,000 to \$10,000 and is also inflation indexed. If passed by voters in 2024 HJR06 ties the Veterans Property Tax Exemption the % of VA Disability.

I pointed out that this could be a conflict if both pass. Rep Alcon the sponsor of the two measures assured me that they will be working on implementation legislation in 2024 session to insure that depending on what passes in Nov 2024 each Veteran will get the maximum Property Tax Exemption. So, if 0% Disable Rating then \$10K, if greater than 0% Disable Rating the greater of \$10 or % Disabled. Rep Alcon also stated that there is no Constitutional obstacle if both pass. Sen Pope then tried to explain how the %Disability version would work that was different from what I understood from Rep Alcon.

I asked that the Committee provide us with a sample calculation of Veterans Prop Tax Exemption with the %Disability in place so we could share it with our members. Rep Alcon said he would get back to us. We will have to watch this legislation closely there seems to be some confusion.

3. Veterans Homeless and Mental Health legislation - the numbers on the handout (pg 10) are from the HUD PIT (point-in-time) Vet Homeless Data. The PIT is usually done in January (they pick a day). Problems with the data is that they do a Sheltered count one year and a Sheltered and Unsheltered count the following year. The latest Sheltered and Unsheltered count (2020) counted only 252 homeless vets in NM. The whole HUD report for 2020 showed a total of 37,252 homeless vets in the US. VA estimates that on any given day there are 107,000 homeless vets in US (3x larger number than the HUD estimate).

So, factoring the VA vs HUD data I told the committee that a conservative estimate for NM would be 700 - 900 homeless vets at any time. They agreed that the actual number should even be higher since Rep Garcia stated the homeless vets on the reservation are most likely not counted.

I suggested that the committee should consider commissioning a study by one of our universities to get a more accurate count (especially in rural areas). They agreed that they want to do data-based legislation and that they need better data.

Questions from the Committee.

After my testimony each member of the committee was given the opportunity to ask questions. Most did not ask questions but made statements of their support for veterans, military and surviving spouse issues. Rep Garcia asked me what the number of homeless vets among the Native American population was and I told him there is no data and I do not know the answer - but that this would be a good project for a legislative or administration staffer.

There were no negative comments or hostile questions from committee.

My testimony ended just before 1100. I then presented Rep Garcia & Sen Pope each a MOAA Certificate of Appreciation for their legislative leadership for the period 2019 - 2023. They both were very pleased.

See Attachments: