

# Annual Report

## Fiscal Year 2012



*Members of Lima Company, 3-25 Marines,  
show their Buckeye spirit in Helmand Province,  
Afghanistan, in January 2011.*

*Used by permission of The Ohio State University.*



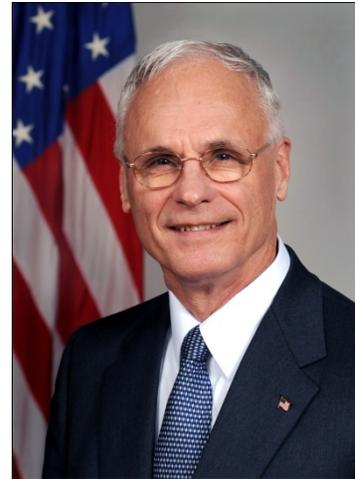
August 1, 2012

Governor Kasich and Secretary Husted,

It's my great honor to lead the Ohio Department of Veterans Services. It's also my distinct pleasure to present to you this Annual Report which chronicles our responsibilities and the actions we are undertaking on behalf of Ohio's veterans.

Since the days of the Civil War, Ohio has always been a leader in answering the call for our nation's defense. The more than 867,000 veterans currently residing in Ohio – the sixth largest population of veterans in the U.S. – are a living testament to that legacy.

More young veterans join the ranks each day as Ohio's sons and daughters return home from deployments in Afghanistan and other areas or from a term of active military service. All of us in this department believe it is our sacred trust to do all that we can for every generation of veterans who have put their lives on the line to guarantee our freedoms.



The department's mission is "To actively identify, connect with, and advocate for veterans and their families." Our goal is to ensure that all veterans receive the benefits they have earned from both the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the State of Ohio. In turn, this is a great economic engine for our state – for example, the VA spent over \$5.7 billion in Ohio in 2011, with more than \$1.6 billion of that total going to direct compensation and pensions for veterans.

This Annual Report provides you a detailed picture of how we are accomplishing our vital mission. I look forward enthusiastically to continuing our efforts to maintain Ohio as a place that veterans of all eras and their families are proud to call home.

Very respectfully,



Thomas N. Moe  
Director  
Ohio Department of Veterans Services



## MSG Shawn T. Hannon

1968 - 2012

This annual report is dedicated to MSG Shawn T. Hannon, 1-148 Infantry Battalion, 37th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Ohio Army National Guard. Shawn was killed April 4, 2012, in Maimanah, Faryab Province, Afghanistan, by a suicide bomber while his unit was conducting a humanitarian mission. Two other Ohio Guardsmen were killed in the same attack.

Shawn was Chief Counsel of the Ohio Department of Veterans Services. Prior to his service here, he worked as a Criminal Defense Attorney in Columbus. He was a graduate of Grove City High School and still resided in the city. Shawn also graduated from Bowling Green State University and Capital University Law School. He was a gifted lawyer, whether defending a client or interpreting Ohio law to better serve veterans. Shawn was actively engaged in the process of establishing Veterans' Courts throughout Ohio and in initiating the process of updating Title 59 of the Ohio Revised Code to better reflect the needs of today's veterans.

He was also a patriot, and staunchly believed that this country and its ideals are worth defending. He was committed to his service in the Ohio Army National Guard. His deployment to Afghanistan was his third overseas tour since 9/11, and his second combat tour.

Shawn was a loving husband to his wife Jamie and a devoted father to his son Evan, born in July 2011. Their loss, as is the case with the family of every fallen service member, is beyond measure. All of us in the Ohio Department of Veterans Services lost a trusted colleague and a dear friend, and Ohio's veterans lost one of their staunchest advocates.

The loss of Shawn, and of all those who have given their lives so that we may live ours in liberty, remind us that the price of freedom is not free – but in the midst of our grief, we may also take comfort that there are many men and women who are willing to bear the burden of defending it.

### INTRODUCTION

The Ohio Department of Veterans Services (ODVS) was created as a Cabinet-level agency on August 21, 2008, by Senate Bill 289 of the 127<sup>th</sup> Ohio General Assembly.

The mission of the ODVS is to actively identify, connect with, and advocate for veterans and their families. Senate Bill 289 defined the mission and gave the department the responsibility to work directly with the county veterans service officers (CVSOs) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), as well as with the various veterans service organizations and other concerned associations.

In January 2011, Governor John Kasich selected Tom Moe as the second Director of ODVS. Director Moe is a retired Air Force Colonel who served over thirty years in the Navy enlisted ranks and as an Air Force officer and pilot.





## EXECUTION

The department carries out its mission through the following major priorities and programs:

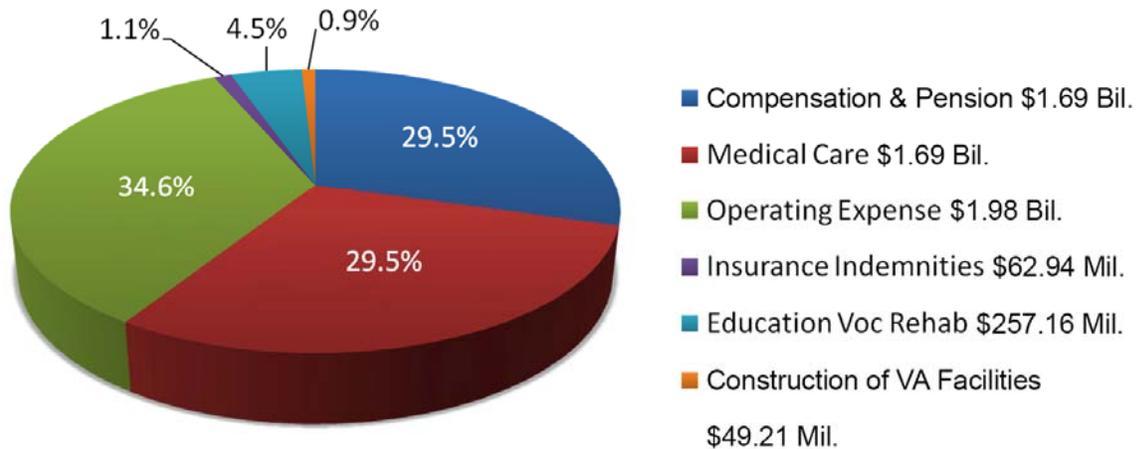
- Conducts outreach to veterans and provides training and oversight to the 88 CVSOs.
- Coordinates programs and operations with the VA, which provides benefits to Ohio veterans.
- Works with the Ohio General Assembly and Congressional representatives to craft legislation in support of veterans and their families at the state and federal levels.
- Communicates and coordinates with other state agencies concerning veterans' programs and support to veterans.
- Administers the Ohio Veterans Bonus for veterans of the Persian Gulf War era and post-9/11 era conflicts, a program which is funded by bonds approved by Ohio voters.
- Operates the Ohio Veterans Homes in Sandusky and Georgetown which are open to Ohio-resident veterans who served in periods of armed conflicts.
- Manages two federal education-related programs: Troops to Teachers and the State Approving Agency.
- Hosts several veterans' ceremonies each year including the Governor's wreath-laying ceremony for Ohio's killed in action and the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame.
- Maintains custodianship of over 1.9 million veterans' records dating back to World War II.

## ECONOMIC PROFILE

The success of ODVS in accomplishing its mission directly impacts the economic health of Ohio. Most of the benefits received by veterans originate at the federal level with the VA. These benefits are comprised of compensation for injuries, health care, educational assistance, home loans and many other programs provided by the VA. In 2011, the VA spent over **\$5.7 billion in Ohio, an increase of \$480 million from the previous year.** These dollars directly benefited not only Ohio veterans but the state's local communities and colleges as well.

The composition of VA funds brought to Ohio is shown in the chart below:

## What Makes up the \$5.7 Billion

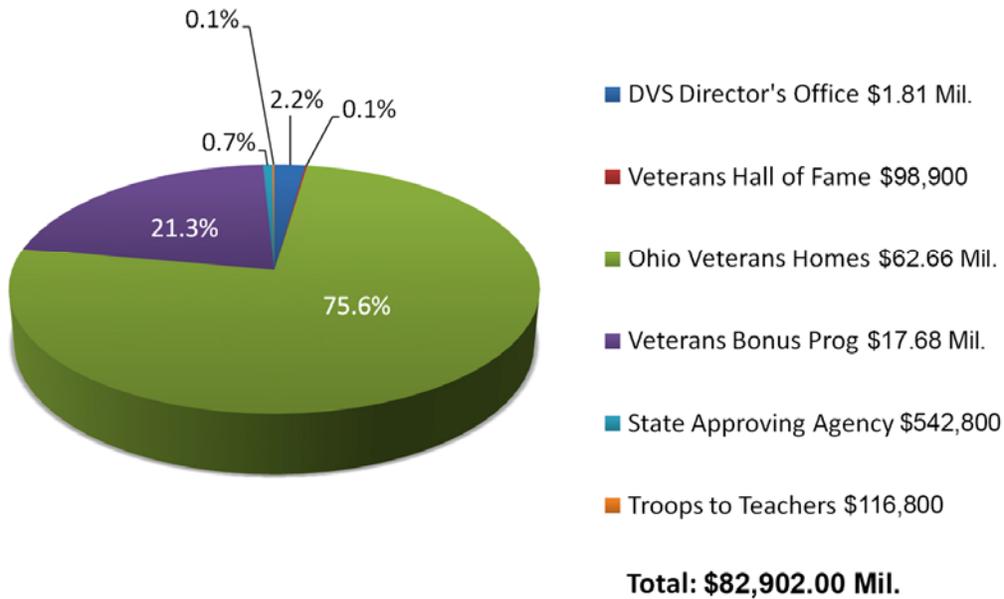


\* Source – VA Annual Geographic Distribution of VA Expenditures (GDY) Report 2011

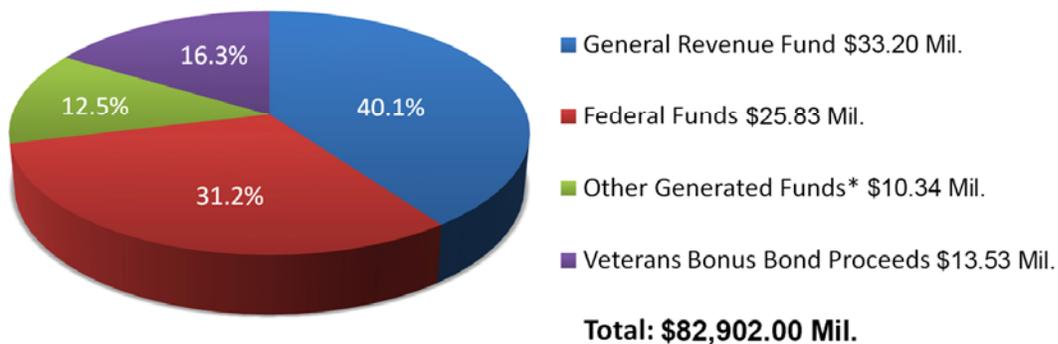
ODVS has not been immune from the belt-tightening necessary in state government for the past two fiscal years, and has held the line on spending in FY 2012. The department relied on innovation by staff and partnerships with other agencies to maintain flat spending without disruption to critical services.

The department spent a total of \$82.9 million in FY 2012 on all programs. Funding came from four major sources, as shown in the charts on the following page:

## Expenditures by Program



## Expenditures by Funding Source



\* Includes OVH resident assessments, hospice care reimbursements, and rental income.



**Ohio Veterans Bonus**

The Ohio Veterans Bonus is a major program administered directly by the department that provides a tangible financial benefit to veterans, their families and the communities where they live. Ohio voters overwhelmingly approved the bonus in November 2009 and in August 2010 the department launched the program statewide. The bonus is funded by the sale of bonds and provides direct payments to Ohio resident veterans of the periods of the Persian Gulf War and the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. A rule change recommended by the department in June 2011 protects the privacy of bonus applications and supporting documents.

The Ohio Veterans Bonus continues a tradition of awarding bonuses to Ohio veterans that dates back to the Civil War. The payment is \$100 a month to veterans who served during the eligible periods in the Persian Gulf theater, or in the Iraq or Afghanistan theaters, up to a maximum of \$1,000. For veterans who served in other parts of the world during these times, the payment is \$50 a month up to a \$500 maximum. Veterans medically discharged as a result of combat service can receive \$1,000, regardless of how much time they spent in theater, plus up to \$500 for months of service elsewhere. Family members of those killed in action or who died from disease as a result of their in-theater service can receive a bonus of \$5,000 plus whatever the service member was eligible for, up to \$6,500.

By the end of FY 2012, the Bonus program paid over \$47.8 million to more than 57,000 Ohio veterans and families. The Bonus statistics as of June 30, 2012 are shown below:

**Ohio Veterans Bonus, Totals Approved and Disbursed**

	Number of New Applications Received	Number of Applications Approved for Payment	Amount Approved For Payment
<b>FY 2011</b>	46,333	42,298	\$35,011,993
<b>FY 2012</b>	12,139	14,782	\$12,825,541
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>58,872</b>	<b>57,080</b>	<b>\$47,837,534</b>



**Ohio Veterans Homes**

A major part of the department's mission is operating the Ohio Veterans Homes (OVH), a responsibility assumed when the department was created in August 2008. The Homes provide direct nursing home care at facilities in Sandusky and Georgetown, as well as domiciliary living to qualified veterans in Sandusky. The Sandusky home opened in 1888 to care for veterans of the Civil War. The home in Georgetown opened in 2003.

Both homes and the domiciliary are open to honorably discharged veterans of periods of armed conflicts who are or were Ohio residents for at least one year during their lifetime. These veterans must also be infirm or disabled and incapable of earning a living. Each home offers standard nursing home care as well as special care for Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. There are a total of 767 beds maintained between the two homes. The Sandusky home provides 427 nursing home beds and an additional 293 domiciliary or "DOM" beds, while Georgetown offers 147 nursing home beds, including 21 dedicated hospice beds. Both homes were recognized in 2011 for their high level of care by both the Ohio Department of Health and the VA.

The table below shows the number of residents at each OVH facility throughout FY 2012:

<b>Ohio Veterans Homes (OVH), FY 2012, Residents Served</b>			
	Sandusky	Georgetown	Total
<b>Nursing home (standard and special care)</b>	639	176	815
<b>Hospice unit</b>		35	35
<b>Domiciliary</b>	231		231
			<b>1,081</b>



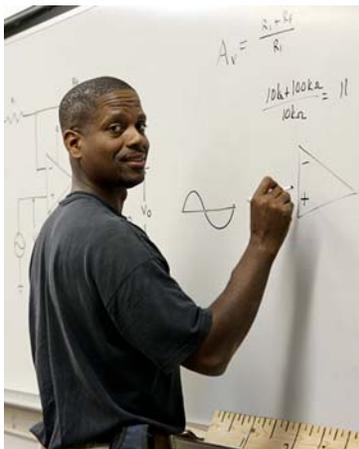
Throughout the fiscal year, the Homes continued providing a nationally-recognized quality of care for veterans, at a cost of care about one-third that of private nursing homes. Per-resident per diem funding by the VA, combined with a sliding scale resident assessment based on ability to pay, provides long-term care value at the Homes both for veterans and their families as well as taxpayers. **This continues a trend of OVH's decreasing reliance on General Revenue Fund (GRF) dollars – from FY 2004, when GRF funding comprised 60 percent of the Homes' budget, that share decreased to 42 percent in FY 2012**, which itself represented a drop of six percent from the 48 percent level of the previous fiscal year. VA per diem funding, meanwhile, increased from 28 percent to 38 percent of OVH's budget.

The OVH have made the most of the GRF funds allocated to them by implementing several cost-saving strategies. For example:

- OVH was awarded a \$690,000 grant from the VA in May 2012 to fund the costs of renovations to Sandusky home's cemetery. When these renovations are complete, the cemetery will be in compliance with the National Cemetery Association (NCA) shrine standards and State Cemetery Grant Services (SCGS) requirements. The renovation includes repairing or replacing existing headstones, resetting and realigning all of the headstones, restoring associated turf and the potential removal of trees that may interfere with current and future grave sites. This hallowed ground is the final resting place of 4,177 men and women veterans of Ohio, dating back to those who served in the Civil War. This number includes two Medal of Honor recipients and 11 Purple Heart recipients.

- The state Rehabilitation Services Commission became a tenant at the Sandusky home in April 2011. This agreement was expected to save the commission more than \$50,000 a year and keep state dollars in-house. During the first year of the agreement, the commission saved \$53,157 in rent.
- Also in April 2011, the OVH entered into a three-year discounted power agreement with American Electric Power in Sandusky. The first year of this agreement ended with a savings to OVH of \$91,912.
- The Homes continued a practice initiated in 2011 to purchase from federal VA procurement contracts rather than state contracts, saving additional dollars.

OVH has also undertaken some significant steps to increase services to its veteran residents. In April 2012, a 42-bed Domiciliary Plus (DOM+) unit was opened, allowing the OVH to provide services to veterans who can mostly live independently, but still require some additional supervision and prompting for issues such as medication and meal times. The unit was created by re-purposing 42 beds within the existing domiciliary. This new unit has helped increase the number of domiciliary residents, and was achieved with no additional GRF funding. This followed on the successful opening in January 2011 of a hospice wing at the Georgetown home, through a public-private partnership with the non-profit Stein Hospice that was also accomplished without additional GRF dollars.



### Veterans Educational Programs

The Ohio Department of Veterans Services is the Ohio agent for the federally-funded Veterans Educational Programs (VEP) Office, which oversees the Troops to Teachers (TTT) and State Approving Agency (SAA) programs.

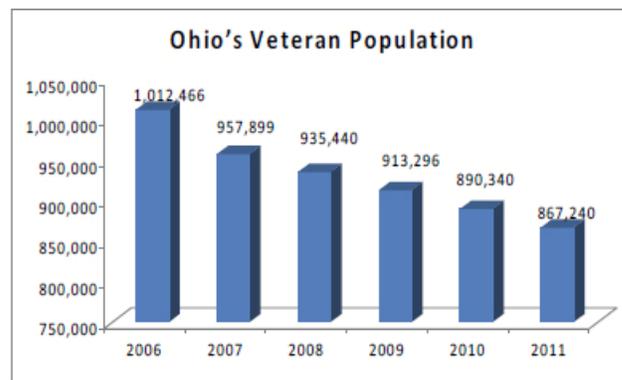
TTT assists veterans in obtaining teaching certificates and provides counseling and mentoring to place them in high-needs schools, not only to teach, but to serve as positive role models in their schools and local communities.

In FY 2012, the TTT program partnered with the Reserve Officer Training Corps on a national level and placed 38 veterans in teaching positions across Ohio. Prior to the partnership, Ohio had only hired nine veterans in FY 2011.

The VA changed the role of the SAA in the FY 2012 contract. Previously, it was to evaluate and approve institutions and academic programs to educate veterans through the Montgomery GI Bill and Post-9/11 GI Bill programs. This fiscal year their role is to ensure approved institutions and organizations are compliant with VA policies and guidelines when reporting veteran enrollment. In 2011, the VA spent over \$257 million in Ohio on vocational rehabilitation, employment and education, which signifies a national ranking of 14<sup>th</sup> in this category. This represents an increase of \$46 million from 2010 and an overall increase of \$146 million from 2009 spending.

### PROFILE OF VETERANS IN OHIO

The VA estimates the veteran population in Ohio, as of 2011, to be over 867,000. Although decreased, **Ohio still has the sixth-largest veterans' population in the country.** A graphic of the state's population is shown below. The overall number of veterans will likely continue to decrease as veterans from World War II and the Korean War pass away. However, there remains a sizable community of Vietnam veterans in the state and a growing population of the current generation of Afghanistan and Iraq veterans.



★ Ohio Still has the 6<sup>th</sup> Largest Veterans Population in the Nation.

\*Source - VA Annual Geographic Distribution of VA Expenditures (GDX) Report 2006-2011



## THE DEPARTMENT'S MAIN CHALLENGE

The mission of finding and connecting our veterans to their benefits is made particularly challenging since veterans of all eras often don't realize they might qualify for benefits. For example, a veteran who injured his leg jumping from the back of a truck during peacetime service 30 years ago – and whose injury healed at the time – could be eligible for compensation today if the injury developed into arthritis. While the VA has relatively accurate estimates of the number of veterans living in each county, identifying and contacting those veterans continues to be the priority mission of the department.

Once veterans are identified, the place to connect them to their benefits is the veterans service office in each county. This is a local entity controlled by the County Veterans Service Commission (CVSC) whose members are nominated by veterans service organizations and appointed by a county common pleas judge. ODVS trains and then certifies these commissioners and can decertify them.

The County Veterans Service Offices (CVSOs) help veterans apply for the benefits they have earned and also provide them with direct financial assistance when necessary. Historically, veterans receive about 40 percent more of the federal benefits they have earned when they have help applying for them.

From the time ODVS was created in 2008, it has maintained a continual focus on its principal mission of finding veterans and connecting them to the benefits they have earned. Since the 2006 IDA study when Ohio ranked 50<sup>th</sup> in the per capita dollar amount that veterans in the state received in compensation from the VA, the state has climbed ten places to be ranked 40<sup>th</sup>.

All members of the department realize that there is still much work to be done to truly connect Ohio's veterans to the benefits they have earned commensurate with the size of their population's contribution to the nation. In all actions, ODVS is guided by the words spoken by Abraham Lincoln and enshrined in the rotunda of the Ohio State House – "to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan."



## THE YEAR IN REVIEW

Fiscal Year 2012 was a year of significant forward movement for the Ohio Department of Veterans Services (ODVS). A number of initiatives were launched or continued to actively identify, connect with, and advocate for veterans and their families while also providing maximum value to the taxpayers of this state. At the same time, it is important to note that the accomplishments detailed in this report are largely accomplished by a staff of fewer than 20 at the department's Columbus headquarters.

There is no doubt that the efforts made on all fronts by the department's staff are paying positive dividends. ODVS learned from the VA in March 2012 that Ohio had made a great leap in increasing the number of veterans connected to compensation for military injuries and pension for aged, low-income veterans. The percentage of veterans connected to disability compensation in 2011 rose to 11.66 percent of all veterans, a 1.12 percent increase from 2010. This was 26<sup>th</sup> best in the nation for the year, with nearly 5,000 more veterans connected. In terms of pensions, Ohio increased its rate of connection to 1.8 percent. While the number is small, it is nearly double the rate from 2010 and represents approximately 15,700 more veterans receiving this benefit. These measurable increases can be attributed to enhanced outreach efforts by the department, frequent visits to the field by department leadership, improved training of county service officers, the work of our liaison at the Cleveland VA to streamline claims, and the continuing work of county veteran service officers.

Director Tom Moe and Assistant Director Jason Dominguez completed a mission in October 2011 that had begun in January – to visit each of Ohio's 88 County Veteran Service Offices (CVSOs), fulfilling a promise to Governor John Kasich to evaluate first-hand the delivery of services to veterans across the state. These visits provided an opportunity to get to know those on the front lines of veterans services, and also to see the challenges that the service officers face, particularly in reaching veterans in rural areas. The visits also provided a baseline of information as ODVS examines better ways of delivering services to veterans statewide. Combined with a robust speaking schedule at

local events and veterans organizations, it raised the profile of department leadership with the veterans served and the people who work directly with them.

### Outreach

Communications and outreach efforts built on the foundation of the previous fiscal year by continuing an active presence on Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube. The web site was continually updated with department and other news releases related to veterans. The department's listserv grew to over 3,300 subscribers and became the primary channel for releasing a monthly newsletter as well as periodic news releases and other items of interest to the veterans' community. Direct outreach at veterans-themed events – such as job fairs, the VA small business conference and hiring fair in Detroit, unit re-integration briefings, and veterans' days at various venues, to include the Ohio State Fair – were ongoing by members of the Ohio Veterans Bonus team, OVH staff, and the Communications team.

Statewide radio and TV advertising was done in two-month packages through the Ohio Association of Broadcasters and the Ohio News Network (ONN). The ONN advertising also included online ads both on their sites and partner sites such as Yahoo. To further aid in branding recognition efforts,



the department's web site address was changed to [www.ohiovet.gov](http://www.ohiovet.gov). This coincides with the toll-free number, 1-877-OHIO-VET, which has options that provide a contact numbers for each county and a direct connection to Ohio Veterans Bonus team members.



Work continued to correct the discovery in FY 2011 that 47 CVSOs did not have an online presence. This launched a project to provide a generic contact page for those county offices on the department's web site and also to provide a unique page that can be integrated into the main county site. To date, only two CVSOs are not online.

ODVS also established a partnership with the Bureau of Motor Vehicles to gather names and addresses of persons who self-identify as veterans when asked by a deputy registrar at the time they renew their driver's license. In February 2012, the department and the VA of central Ohio (Chalmers P. Wylie Outpatient Clinic) entered into an agreement to share this data for purposes of contacting veterans who were not previously connected to veterans benefits. The VA and the department conducted a joint mailing in June, at VA expense, to 6,000 veterans in 13 central Ohio counties. Additionally, county veterans service offices can enter into a similar agreement with the department and obtain the data base for their county.

The goal of all marketing efforts was to bring veterans to the doors of their local CVSOs where they could learn about, and apply, for all the federal and state benefits they're qualified for. Thus, the training of county veterans service officers is vitally important.

### **Training and Standards**

ODVS, in conjunction with the Ohio Association of County Veterans Service Officers and the VA, offers training and certification to county veterans service officers, and also trains and certifies the county veterans service commissioners who supervise the county offices. The department meets quarterly with all veterans service officers and conducts annual refresher training on a small-group level, by region or district. This annual training includes any federal or state benefit changes, so that the county officers are prepared to answer questions and properly prepare claims applications. In FY 2012, the department conducted training at 12 separate locations throughout the state from January through March. Those trained included 350 veterans service commissioners, 130 veterans service officers and 27 staff members, for a grand total of 507. Additional training sessions certified or re-certified 110 commissioners and accredited 34 service officers.

The department launched a major effort this fiscal year aimed at continuously improving and upgrading county operations called the Strategic Planning Initiative. Department staff members meet regularly with representatives from the Ohio State Association of Veterans Service Commissioners and the Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Officers. The goal of these sessions is to develop standards for county veteran operations and identify ways to improve service delivery to veterans in all counties. To date, six meetings have been completed.

### **Cleveland VA Regional Office Liaison**

Ohio's five largest veterans service organizations (VSOs) have all certified the training offered by ODVS. This is an important broadening of service to veterans. The VSOs have representatives at the Cleveland VA Regional Office, where claims generated in Ohio are submitted. These VSO representatives receive claims filed by the county veterans service officers in which individual veterans have designated the VSO to advocate the claim on the veterans behalf. This enables ODVS and the county veterans service officers the department has trained to become advocates for claims filed through the VSO's.



Since the beginning of FY 2011, the department has had a liaison officer assigned to the Cleveland VA Regional Office. This person monitors claims and identifies problems, which the department then works to resolve by directly coordinating with the CVSOs who originated the claims and the VSOs who advocate on the veterans' behalf. This initiative has demonstrably expedited numerous claims. In FY 2012, the department's liaison officer made large strides in service improvement, including the following:

- Established a first-ever CVSO Hot-Line, which accredited CVSOs can call to track the progress of claims from their office; there is also an online component that allows CVSOs to view these claims. This hot-line service is now being duplicated in other states.



- Implemented a Standardized Compensation Claim Packet Layout for CVSOs.
- Increased CVSO online access to all the VA's systems from 20 percent to 46 percent of service officers in all counties. This is an ongoing project that requires training and some upgrade of local systems. The goal is 100 percent.
- Increased CVSO ability to send secure data from 11 percent to 68 percent of counties. Again, this project will be ongoing until 100 percent is reached.

### **Justice-Involved Veterans**

Ensuring appropriate justice for veterans in the court system is a priority for the department. This builds upon efforts begun in 2011 at the initiation of Ohio Supreme Court Justice Evelyn Stratton. Courts throughout the state are studying the implementation of special Veterans' Courts, where the emphasis is on treatment and diversion rather than punishment. Currently, nine jurisdictions have Veterans' Courts in operation, and Veterans' Courts are under consideration in seven other locations. Ohio's legal Risk Assessment used in courts statewide will now determine if an individual has served in the military.

### **Inter-Agency Initiatives**

The department maintains open lines of communication with other state agencies concerning veterans issues and sits on a number of committees concerned with the education, mental health, and family support of Ohio's veterans. Notably, regarding education, the department has designated a liaison officer to work with the Board of Regents to promote veterans' services and awareness at Ohio's public colleges and universities. To date, the department has surveyed student veterans' concerns and re-established a reporting system to track services for student veterans and identify areas for improvement.

In FY 2012, one of the most important services ODVS is performing in the inter-departmental area is the department's support for veterans' employment:

- The creation by ODVS of the "Battlefront to Homefront" campaign to link Ohio National Guard troops returning from Afghanistan deployments to veteran-specific employment services provided by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS). ODJFS and the Guard are collaborating to identify the troops in need of employment prior to their return from overseas and beginning the process of connecting them to one-on-one employment services at the county level upon their return.
- The establishment of procedures for the referral of employers who seek to hire veterans to link them to the ODJFS Veterans Workforce team, thus promoting maximum outreach and utilization.
- The development of relationships with private interests and other state agencies to help educate them on the value of recruiting and retaining veterans for employment.

Throughout history, the sacrifices of our military and veterans have ensured the freedom of this nation to grow and prosper. Honoring that service and sacrifice of veterans is a component of the department's mission that is particularly close to the heart of all who serve here.

ODVS joined with the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) in September 2011 to host a ceremony of the first flag raising of the POW/MIA flag at Ohio rest stops. ODOT has since raised the flag at all interstate rest stops. The support of veterans' issues by Director Wray and ODOT is typical of the teamwork of all the directors and their people.

## Public Ceremonies and Events

Each year, ODVS plans and conducts an induction ceremony in November, around Veterans Day, for the distinguished veterans selected for induction into the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame. This began in 1992 to honor Ohioans for their post-military contributions. In 2011, 20 more veterans joined the Hall that now includes a total of 428 astronauts, government officials, police officers, community leaders, and veterans' advocates.



The Governor's Wreath-Laying Ceremony is held each year before Memorial Day weekend to honor the men and women of Ohio who were killed during the previous year in service to the nation; 23 were so honored this year, including three Ohio Army National Guardsmen killed in Afghanistan. One of those lost was the department's Chief Counsel, MSG Shawn T. Hannon. Shawn was deeply engaged in the implementation of the Veterans' Courts mentioned earlier.

The department puts a great deal of emphasis on outreach for women veterans, and holds a conference every other year to highlight women's issues. The October 2011 conference was the largest in the U.S., attended by more than 500 women veterans. Ohio has been selected to host the June 2013 conference of the National Association of State Women Veterans' Coordinators. Another statewide women veterans' conference will be held in September 2013. In addition, the department hosted a panel discussion which the Governor addressed during Women's History Month in March 2012. It featured women veterans from World War II to the present.

## Veterans' Records

In other operational matters, the ODVS Records Section received approximately 3,876 request for copies of discharges during the fiscal year, or about 75 requests per week. Roughly 8,830 discharged documents were received for filing and or digitizing, or over

730 documents per week. An additional 17,000 are in the process of digitization. Constituent contacts for assistance, inquiries, or complaints were steady throughout the FY, and were responded to both timely and professionally.

### LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY

Throughout the fiscal year, ODVS continued to actively work with sponsors to assist in crafting legislation to benefit veterans in Ohio.

The principal achievement in legislation during FY 2012 was when Governor Kasich signed **Senate Bill 134 – Vietnam Veterans’ Day** (Wagoner), **designating March 30 of each year as Vietnam Veteran’s Day in Ohio**. This corrects a long-standing oversight of a formal recognition of this generation of veterans, and allows for events honoring them to be held each year statewide. Plans are underway for ceremonies next year to honor the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of that war.

Other legislation took aim at improving veterans’ employment prospects, access to benefits, and education for families:

- **House Bill 337 – Commercial Drivers’ License** (Rosenberger)  
Signed by the Governor on January 27, it allows Ohio to waive the Commercial Driver’s License skills test if a veteran was regularly employed within the previous 90 days in a military position requiring regular use of a commercial vehicle.
- **House Bill 490 – Veterans Services Mid-Biennium Review** (Dovilla, Landis)  
This was a comprehensive bill, signed June 26, that was part of the Governor’s Mid-Biennium Review. It allows county veteran service officers to directly access military discharge forms, or DD 214’s, from county recorders for claims verification, thus speeding up claims processing. It authorizes ODVS to move toward a paperless information distribution system to inform the public about county veterans service commissions. The bill also extends eligibility for in-state tuition at

public colleges and universities to the spouses and children of deceased veterans. Finally, the bill adds a member of the National Guard Association of the United States to the ODVS Advisory Committee.



The department also advocated for two significant pieces of federal legislation:

- **House Resolution 2074 – 70% Issue**

This legislation corrects federal law enacted in 2006 which allowed for a higher VA per-diem rate for veterans designated as 70 percent disabled and in need of skilled nursing care. The bill caused significantly less overall federal aid being paid to 30 states with Medicare-certified veterans' homes, like Ohio's, resulting in an Ohio burden of \$30,000 per month in order to provide the skilled care needed. This resolution corrects that situation, and has unanimously passed the House and is now pending in the Senate. While some states have turned away veterans with such a high level of disability, Ohio has not and instead bore the increased costs. The department continues to work with both Senator Rob Portman and Senator Sherrod Brown concerning this legislation.

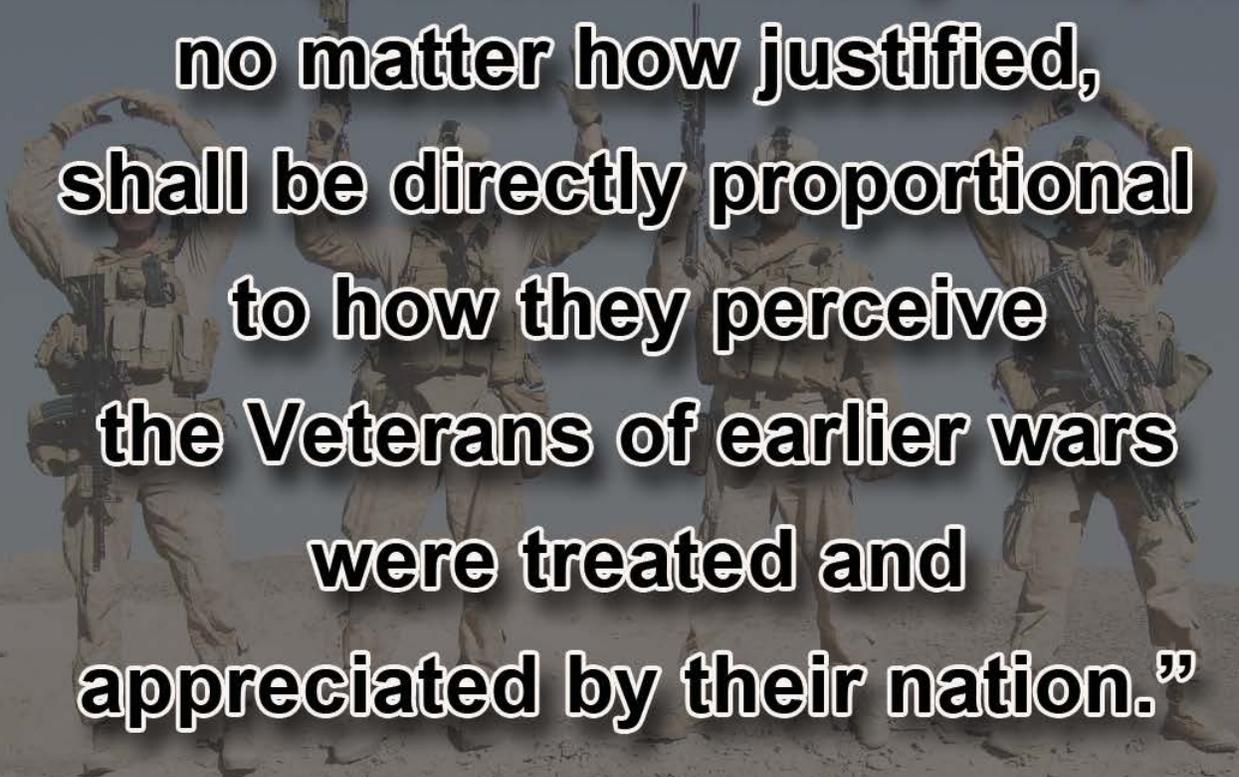
- **House Resolution 2051 and Senate Resolution 2244 – Missing in America**  
Director Moe had the honor to testify before the U.S. Congress in support of this bill, sponsored by Representative Pat Tiberi, and drafted testimony in support of the companion Senate bill sponsored by Senator Portman. The bill grants the VA authority to take disposition of properly identified remains of unclaimed veterans and appropriately honor them with burial in a national cemetery. Ohio is one of the states leading the way, begun by a private foundation and supported by the American Legion. The first burial of unclaimed veterans in Ohio took place in May 2012 at the National Cemetery in Dayton.

Finally, ODVS is continuing a thorough review of Title 59 of the Ohio Revised Code, which governs the department, to ensure that it addresses the current realities of today's veterans and provides adequate support to them.

### CONCLUSION

The Ohio Department of Veterans Services proved during FY 2012 that it can and will perform each task set before it to the highest standards. As this report shows, even with a small staff engaged in operations, policy and programming, great things can be accomplished by those who are dedicated to the cause. Everyone in ODVS will continue to give their utmost efforts to provide veterans with the best service possible at a maximum value to taxpayers.





**“The willingness with which  
our young people are  
likely to serve in any war,  
no matter how justified,  
shall be directly proportional  
to how they perceive  
the Veterans of earlier wars  
were treated and  
appreciated by their nation.”**

**– George Washington**