



# 2020 Annual Report

## Executive Summary

The City and County of San Francisco Veterans Affairs Commission had a remarkable and impactful 2020 despite the challenges and limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to revitalizing the Commission's bylaws, roster, and internal practices, the Commission successfully lobbied for the expedited hiring of the County Veterans Service Officer, recommended several pieces of legislation to varying degrees of success, and continued to hold public hearings to advance the mission of the Commission and improve the lives of the nearly 27,000 veterans who live in San Francisco.

There remains significant progress to be made in the realm of support the City's veterans, particularly with the hundreds of veterans experiencing homelessness and thousands more receiving healthcare at San Francisco Veterans Administration Medical Center or mental healthcare with the various service providers. The continued challenges in reintegrating veterans into an evolving workforce, the many issues exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the mental health care issues that will undoubtedly compound after the remarkable experience of 2020 will remain the key issues areas to take head-on in 2021. To these ends, San Francisco's elected leaders must act proactively to ensure that our veterans receive the resources and opportunities they earned while serving in uniform with dignity and expediency.

The Veterans Affairs Commission and San Francisco's elected leaders must take bold, progressive action so that veterans in San Francisco will have the opportunity to live and thrive in a more inclusive, respectful, and strong community.

## Background

The Veterans Affairs Commission (VAC) was rocked by unexpected departures in 2019-2020, but the membership has remained diverse and representative of the broad community and interests in San Francisco thanks to timely reappointments and new commissioner appointments. There are currently fourteen sitting Commissioners out of seventeen seats, with vacancies in Board of Supervisor's seats 4, 5, and 12, and the expiration of Board of Supervisor's seat 2 in January 31, 2021. The Commission has received several applicants for the vacant positions and will endeavor to work with the Board of Supervisor's Rules Committee to make the appropriate appointments/reappointments in January 2021.

The following officers were elected and installed for the 2020 administrative year:

- Commissioner Victor Olivieri, Ph.D., President
- Commissioner Margo Ellis, Vice President (resigned October 2020)
- Commissioner Christopher McDonald, Secretary (resigned June 2020)
- Commissioner George Ishikata, Interim Secretary
- Commissioner Courtney Miller, Secretary

The following officers were elected and installed for the 2021 administrative year:

- Commissioner Victor Olivieri, Ph.D., President
- Commissioner Ikram Mansori, Vice President
- Commissioner Stephen Martin-Pinto, Secretary

In recent years and under renewed leadership, the Veterans Affairs Commission has reinvigorated its mission of capturing the current state of services, benefits, and opportunities available to San Franciscan veterans, as well as uncovering the gaps in support and the most pressing issues facing those who served in the armed forces who now call San Francisco home, in order to better adhere with the San Francisco Veterans Affairs Commission's charge to make **“recommendations to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors concerning the coordination of economic development, healthcare, and social services programs as they relate to veterans who are residents of the City and County of San Francisco.”**

This Annual Report was drafted through the collaborative work of the Veterans Affairs Commissioners, the newly aligned Commission Committees, both testimony and public discussions, and public comment at regularly scheduled Commission meetings throughout 2020, with the exception of those that took place during the first annual San Francisco Veterans Summit, held in June 2019.<sup>1</sup>

## **2020 Veterans Affairs Commission Accomplishments**

2020 was a difficult year for many reasons related to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the VAC accomplished a major milestone, pushed several legislative pieces forward, and continued to take part in veterans-related advocacy and public events:

- Successfully organized, mobilized, and lobbied to expedite the hiring of the County Veterans Service Officer after the position sat vacant for over a year.
- Drafted a resolution urging the City Administrator to immediately nominate an Interim County Veterans Service Officer to safeguard the public health of the veterans in the City and County of San Francisco during the existence of a local

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<sup>1</sup> The 2020 Veterans Summit was postponed until 2021 due to COVID-19 meeting restrictions, pursuant to the Twelfth Supplement to the Mayoral Proclamation Declaring the Existence of a Local Emergency dated February 25, 2020.

emergency due to the ongoing spread of the novel coronavirus COVID-19 (introduced by Supervisor Matt Haney).

- Drafted a resolution Commending Captain Brett Crozier, United States Navy for his Courageous Leadership as Commanding Officer, USS Theodore Roosevelt (introduced and passed by Supervisor Catherine Stefani).
- Drafted a resolution in support the mission of the Veterans Justice Court with appropriate funding.
- Drafted an ordinance amending the Administrative Code to establish the County Veterans Fund to be used to defray the business and operating costs of the Veterans' Affairs Commission and support the programmatic efforts of the Veterans' Affairs Commission.
- Drafted an ordinance amending the Administrative Code to place the County Veterans Service Officer under the purview of the Veterans Affairs Commission.
- Drafted an ordinance exempting property owners from the property tax of a rented unit occupied by a HUD-VASH recipient or purchased by a veteran to incentivize the leasing of property to lower income veterans and the purchase of homes in San Francisco by veterans.
- Strengthened committee structure and supervisorial liaison assignments to better oversee the business of the Veterans Affairs Commission.

In addition, the Veterans Affairs Commission made significant strides in deepening its understanding of the issues plaguing the San Francisco veterans community by receiving the testimony of subject matter experts and veterans experiencing a gap in the following areas:

- Larry Vasquez, Capt. USN (Ret.), Director, Military and Veterans Affairs, Office of the Mayor, City of Los Angeles
- Judge Michael Begert – San Francisco Superior Court
- Allyson West – Director of Collaborative Justice Programs, San Francisco Superior Court
- Kate Shadoan – Benefits and Resource, San Francisco HUB Director
- Michael Blecker – Executive Director, Swords to Plowshares
- Gerard Choucron – Executive Director, Heart and Armor
- California Economic Development Office Veterans Data Sharing
- Adult Drug Court and Veterans Treatment Court Discretionary Grant Program
- San Francisco Emergency Operation Center veterans coordination
- Bataan Death March Commemoration
- Effects of defunding of US Post Office on veterans
- Veterans Preference in below market rate housing
- Philippine Human Rights campaign
- Board of Supervisors' resolution limiting Presidential powers

Additionally, Commission Committees and individual Commissioners held regular meetings and calls with dozens of agencies, city leaders, and organizations working in the veterans' space. These meetings serve to impart policy makers with a clear view of challenges

veterans are facing, opportunities for improvement, and ways to significantly impact the lives of veterans and their families in San Francisco and the Bay Area.

## 2021 Veterans Affairs Commission Goals

1. Improve access to **health care services**, particularly mental health and COVID-19 related services for veterans in San Francisco
2. Improve the transitional housing pipeline and functionally end veteran's **homelessness** in San Francisco
3. Improve veterans' access to quality job training, education, and **employment** opportunities that impact key high growth sectors, help retain and maintain high potential talent, and provide livable wages

## The State of Veterans in San Francisco

### Baseline Data

- In 2018, 21,695 veterans resided in San Francisco<sup>2</sup>
- 7,013 of San Francisco resident veterans receive some or all of their healthcare through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
  - Additionally, over 60,000 veterans travel to San Francisco from the wider region to receive care at the San Francisco VA Medical Center
  - The VA reported a total of \$345,587,000 in spending in San Francisco
  - VA operates on VA Medical Center and 6 clinics in the City and County of San Francisco
  - VA currently reports seeing over 67,522 patients across its 7 local clinics, 10,595 of whom receive mental health treatment
- The 2019 San Francisco Point in Time (PIT) count tallied 608 homeless veterans during its one-night count
- In 2019, 632 annual VA Supportive Housing (VASH) grants were available in San Francisco
- The San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing currently has a by-name list of 360 veterans currently in need of housing<sup>3</sup>

Beyond these data points, the Veterans Affairs Commission (VAC) conducted a first of its kind Veterans Summit in 2019 to learn from city and community agencies in the veterans policy domain. The summit broadened the Commission's effort to develop keep a close pulse of the current state of affairs for veterans who call San Francisco home. Of specific note, the summit highlighted the outstanding work being done by Swords to Ploughshares, specifically their pro-bono programs that help veterans appeal other-than-honorable

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.va.gov/vetdata/Expenditures.asp>

<sup>3</sup> <http://hsh.sfgov.org/research-reports/san-francisco-homeless-point-in-time-count-reports/>

discharges and restore access to earned services and care. This event, which will become an annual occurrence, was highly beneficial and heavily informed this report.

In conducting its initial assessment, the VAC focused on a number of unsurprising issues that are the most prominent and consistent concerns of both veterans and policy makers. Effectively mirroring the VAC's charge and highlighting the persistent challenges faced by veterans in San Francisco, the top three issues impacting veterans in San Francisco are (and continue to be):

- 1. Healthcare**
- 2. Housing & Homelessness**
- 3. Employment & Workforce Development**

In order to focus effort and impact, the VAC recommends that the Mayor and Board of Supervisor focus their attention on these three strategic priorities. The sections below outline target issues and opportunities within each strategic priority that merit further investigation and collaboration with Federal, State, and local service providers alongside public, non-profit, and private sector partners.

### Health Care

Improving the wellness and healthcare for veterans will always be a top priority for the VAC and must be similarly prioritized by the City and County of San Francisco. San Francisco is one of the healthiest and most innovative cities in the world. We must harness the community's strengths to improve the lives of our veterans.

The Department of Veterans Affairs healthcare system provides medical care for about one third of veterans in San Francisco. This is about the average rate of coverage across the state and country. Their ability to do so is enabled by the location of the San Francisco VA Medical Center (VAMC) – the VA's General Practice Center of Innovation. Contrary to a common belief, not all veterans are eligible for free VA healthcare.

The Department of Veterans Affairs is only responsible for providing comprehensive healthcare for transitioning military service members for five years after they transition out of the military. After that, access to care through VA is dependent on the severity of chronic health conditions resulting from a veteran's military service. For veterans who end their service without a documented chronic condition, there is no guarantee they will have access to free care.

If a veteran earns above a certain disability rating threshold, they may use their insurance at the VA Medical Center the same way they would use it to see any other provider with the VA billing the insurance company for care. Eligible veterans may also elect to utilize limited VA healthcare services with some co-pays. If the veteran does not have insurance and cannot afford care, then the process to try and qualify for care at the VA is similar to other government programs for those unable to afford other medical coverage.

Some concerns and significant issues in the healthcare realm that the VAC has focused its attention on are:

- **Psychiatric Unit Remodel:** The San Francisco VAMC will close its psychiatric unit this fall for a one-year long renovation. This is going to be a major disruption in care for veterans in our region. Capacity is being increased at the Palo Alto VA Medical Center and Cooperative Agreements are underway with the University of San Francisco and Aurora Health Care to augment the local need for capacity. There will still likely be issues that arise from this needed remodeling plan.
- **VA Staffing Shortages:** Similar to other public sector and non-profit employers in San Francisco, cost of living is a major contributor to the VA's inability to fill and retain staff. This challenge is magnified by VA-wide challenges in healthcare recruitment and retention due to overall competitiveness in the healthcare field alongside restrictions on federal hiring and pay scales. This shortage is most pronounced among mental health and other specialty physicians and nursing staff.<sup>4</sup> The extreme cost of living in San Francisco and the Bay Area compounds these issues. Reforms at the VA meant to increase access to timely care have greatly increased the likelihood that veterans will be sent to non-VA facilities on a contract basis to receive specialty care in the interim. These facilities lack the custom-tailored programs that the VA has developed for the veteran population.
- **Veteran's Choice Act Transition:** The Veteran's Choice Act, which allows some veterans to choose non-VA providers for some of their service-connected medical needs can theoretically increase access to care and decrease wait times. However, the increased complexity of the healthcare complex will likely decrease the quality of care and patient satisfaction in the long term. The VA healthcare system has consistently outpaced the private sector health system in overall quality of care while grading on par with overall patient satisfaction.<sup>5</sup> While the VA transitions to a broader mix of VA-provided and contracted care, veterans may experience more convenient and timely appointments coupled with a less centralized managed care experience, though long term impacts of this change should be monitored.
- **VA Inpatient Transitional Housing Beds:** In San Francisco, the VA currently has only 12 beds for homeless veterans transitioning from inpatient care, all located at the San Francisco VAMC. This is an abhorrently low number given the acute homelessness problem in our City, especially given the prevalent comorbidity of mental and behavioral health disorders among those experiencing homelessness. The VA is constrained by space at the Fort Miley location and is continuing to look

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2019/02/21/as-va-staff-vacancies-rise-union-leaders-blast-administration-officials-for-setting-us-up-to-fail/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-hospitals-usa-quality/va-may-top-other-hospitals-in-quality-but-not-patient-satisfaction-idUSKBN17K2D2>

into transitional bed expansions in other locations in the greater Bay Area region. VA has historically not prioritized favor of housing vouchers for use in the community over transitional housing on VA campuses.

- **Research Collaboration:** The VA participates in research and other studies with local medical systems and universities. It has continually sought to expand this collaboration with an openness to suggestions and introductions to facilitate communication and cooperation across the local healthcare delivery and academic landscape. Given the current opioid and other high-potency prescription drug crisis, it is important that the City advocate for a change in law to ensure expansion of medical research related to cannabis. As it stands, veterans have inequitable access to care in California, where cannabis is completely legal, since the VA restricts its medical professionals from have the type of open and honest conversations that other San Franciscans can have with their care teams about the efficacy of cannabis and its potential interactions with other course of treatment.
- **Greater Coordination during COVID-19:** There is little or no coordination between the city agencies, the city's Emergency Operations Center, the VA Medical Center, regional medical centers, and the County Veterans Service Officer. A dedicated liaison is necessary to coordinate response efforts, compile essential data, and provide recommendations to the Veterans Affairs Commission. The most logical office to handle these tasks in the County Veterans Service Officer.

## Housing & Homelessness

Many cities have pledged to end veterans homelessness in their cities, a commitment the San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing should clearly publicize. This is a complex task but can be accomplished through providing short- and long-term housing and adopting a housing first approach.

The number of veterans still experiencing homelessness remains a national tragedy. Nationally nearly 11% of Americans experiencing homelessness are believed to be veterans. Of veterans experiencing homelessness, 45% are African American or Latinx and 9% identify as women. There are an additional 1.4 million veterans believed to be at risk of experiencing homelessness.<sup>6</sup> This national issue is greatly magnified in San Francisco.

The recent 2019 PIT count identified 8,011 people experiencing homelessness on City streets in one night, an increase of 1,753 (17%) from 2018. Of that number, 608 were veterans, a decrease of 74 (11%) from 2018.<sup>7</sup> While progress in the veterans population, these gains are inadequate when factoring in the significant Federal and State resources available to support veterans experiencing homelessness in San Francisco and the Bay

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<sup>6</sup> [http://nchv.org/index.php/news/media/background\\_and\\_statistics/](http://nchv.org/index.php/news/media/background_and_statistics/)

<sup>7</sup> <http://hsh.sfgov.org/research-reports/san-francisco-homeless-point-in-time-count-reports/>

Area. Unfortunately, these resources are significantly constrained by the city and region's lack of affordable housing.

- **Cost of Living Drives Up Number of San Francisco Veterans Experiencing Homelessness:** 70% of veterans interviewed by the San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing lost their housing in San Francisco due to the high cost of living. 43% have been residents of San Francisco for over 10 years and 31% reported experiencing homelessness for the first time in their lives while residing in San Francisco. This is in contrast to the homelessness crisis in southern California, where a greater rate of homelessness is due to people experiencing chronic homelessness migrating to cities from outside urban centers.<sup>8</sup>
- **San Francisco Housing Authority Reorganization:** In the Spring of 2018, control of the San Francisco Housing Authority, previously a semi-independent agency, was transferred to the city. The agency has been reorganized under the Mayor's Office and has been developing new processes for connecting those experiencing homelessness with housing opportunities.<sup>9</sup> There has long been frustration over the current process that involves 3 different Federal and City departments' inputs to determine eligibility and sources of funding to initiate placements. The transfer of control provides a unique opportunity to influence the process and ensure the needs of veterans remain a top priority. Additionally, the faster veterans receive federally funded assistance, the sooner that the City can redirect resources to other people who may not qualify for other assistance.
- **Hospital to Streets Pipeline:** Patients with mental health or serious medical conditions are often discharged from hospital with no housing plans, to include veterans. This problem will likely be exacerbated by the VA Medical Center's renovation efforts that will temporarily take away short-term treatment beds, adding stress to the already taxed City resources. The City has the opportunity to lead efforts that ensure veterans accessing care at local hospitals (to include San Francisco General Hospital) are identified as veterans and vectored immediately towards existing federal resources aimed at ensuring a continuity of treatment and social care.
- **Recreational Vehicle Living:** 2019 saw a dramatic 45% increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness who live in recreational vehicles (RV) in the Bay Area.<sup>10</sup> This worrying trend (which is notoriously difficult to quantify) is a sign that the housing crisis has led to a new phenomenon –employed people experiencing homelessness. People with the means to afford fuel and some amenities are unwilling or unable to leave their jobs and relocate to areas with lower permanent housing costs. Very little data exists about the people making this transition to RV

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<sup>8</sup> <http://hsh.sfgov.org/wp-content/uploads/FINAL-PIT-Executive-Summary-2019-San-Francisco.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/HUD-turning-control-of-Housing-Authority-over-to-13671916.php>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/aug/05/california-housing-homeless-rv-cars-bay-area>

living, but it is likely that some or many are veterans, to include students accessing their GI Bill benefits at City institutions of higher education.<sup>11</sup> Further research and investigation into the potential causes and policies to mitigate this trend are necessary.

## Employment/Workforce Development

Workforce training needs to provide opportunities for all veterans to translate their existing skills and effectively retrain to succeed in the rapidly evolving local marketplace. Particular attention needs to be paid to education, employment, and job placement programs for transitioning service members, women, and African American veterans who experience unemployment at rates well above national and state averages.

Veterans are a productive, resourceful, well trained, and sought after sector of the employment marketplace. Employers and industries seek to attract veterans as employees for their work ethic and skills, as well as for their own public relations and corporate social responsibility goals. Federal, State, and local veterans employment and training programs have made significant progress over the last decade in reducing unemployment for certain categories of veterans.

As of September 2019, the nationwide unemployment rate was 3.4% with veteran unemployment rate slightly below at 3.2%.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, the Trump administration stopped reporting veterans employment data by demographics. This move is incredibly disconcerting, especially given historical disparities in employment by demographic groups - specifically what is known about unemployment for African-Americans. According to a USA Today article in May 2019, black people in the United States faced an unemployment rate 116% higher than their white counterparts.<sup>13</sup>

For this reason, it is vital that San Francisco ensures that organizations in the City that claim to provide workforce development and employment services maintain records of diversity success. Understanding how unbalanced the scales currently are, if government stops tracking this data or fails to ensure its tracking by third-party providers, the risk of racial injustice within these programs will rise. Beyond ensuring the memorialization of this data in City and local programs, San Francisco should use its influence as a progressive hub of 21<sup>st</sup> Century employment to advocate for the reinstatement of workforce demographic tracking at the federal level. This will help to ensure that programs targeted towards veterans employment support all veterans, regardless of who they are.

- **Low Overall Unemployment Masks Workforce Issues Among Disadvantaged Populations:** In 2015 the last year women and African American veteran

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<sup>11</sup> <https://projects.sfchronicle.com/sf-homeless/24-hours-homelessness/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets/latest-numbers>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2019/05/06/black-unemployment-86-higher-than-us-average/39447773/>

unemployment was reported, the national veteran unemployment rate reached a then record low of 4.4%. However, female veteran unemployment was still above the national average at 5% and African American veteran unemployment was more than double (9.3%) that of their white counterparts. Underprivileged populations are frequently underrepresented or face significant barriers to participation in many highly-praised training, education, and job placement programs. There are several organizations that should be placed on a “School to RV Pipeline” list that highlights inequity in programing.

For example, the VAC has received reports that Vets in Tech, an organization that has enjoyed tremendous praise for veterans workforce development, has focused its efforts on serving veterans with the lowest levels of need. These disturbing reports allege that Vets in Tech may be actively discriminating against minority veterans, dismissing them at irrational rates, and providing little – if any – justification for decisions to dis-enroll black students. When asked to produce clarifying data, Vets in Tech refused. To ensure meaningful progress on racial justice, the City should develop and implement policy to ensure adequate measurements of success are tracked across race and gender demographics.

- **School to RV Pipeline** - The high cost of living, for-profit higher education institutions, and inadequate job training have led to a middle-class “School to RV pipeline”. Veterans are often not receiving adequate training, certifications, and/or job placement in programs meant to address these concerns. In the San Francisco housing market, this has led veterans using their valuable earned benefits on inadequate and ineffective training that does not provide gainful employment. Minority and women veterans are disproportionately impacted due to training programs geared towards tech and construction industries that already present significant barriers to entry.

## Veterans Affairs Commission Policy Recommendations

### Health Care

- **Place the County Veterans Service Officer under the purview of the Veterans Affairs Commission:** The office has one of the smallest budget of any City agency relative to the size of the population it serves and the current staff are not meeting the demand for services, with reports that the staff often work late, that they are overworked, and that the long waits observed at the SF County Veterans Office are accompanied by limited outreach capacity. Beyond that, the position of CVSO was vacant for over a year in 2019-2020, highlighting the need for greater oversight of the office, staffing, budget, and deliverables.
- **Track Impact of San Francisco VAMC Psychiatric Unit Remodel:** The City should monitor the VA’s year-long renovation of the SF VAMC Psychiatric Unit remodel

closely and engage local veterans organizations and service providers in anticipation of expected gaps and failures in coverage. Transportation availability and planning, timeliness of mental health referrals, and getting the word out to veterans about this disruption in service will be key factors in ensuring this necessary renovation does not negatively impact veterans in need of care.

- **Promote Collaborative Medical Research:** The City should investigate areas of opportunity for engagement between the VA and City healthcare agencies. The VAC can facilitate and aid in future engagements and formal partnerships.
- **Add Veterans as a Tracked Population in Healthy San Francisco:** Veterans are not currently a subcategory being tracked in this important initiative. The City should take all efforts to add veterans as tracked demographic within Healthy San Francisco to ensure veterans' health outcomes are tracked.
- **Advocate for Inclusion of Veterans in "Fair Share" of Mental Health Services Act:** The City should advocate for inclusions of veterans into Prop 63 (provides funding, personnel, and other resources to support county mental health programs and monitor progress toward statewide goals for children, transition age youth, adults, older adults, and families) formulae in order to receive a fair share of this public service program. Many of the veterans most in need of community mental health services are not eligible for VA healthcare services due to a lack of service connected disability or dishonorable discharges – often due to the same mental health diagnoses for which they require treatment. Additionally with the implementation of Choice Act reforms and the VA's inability to hire an adequate number of mental health professionals, even veterans enrolled in the VA healthcare system are often eligible to receive mental health care outside of the VA system. County health departments can contract with VA and Tricare West to provide fee for service care for eligible veterans. San Francisco should act of this opportunity to provide a higher level of care to veterans and activate another funding stream for these services.
- **Develop Collaborative Veterans Substance Abuse Disorder Strategic Plan:** The City should develop, in concert with the VA, strategic goals to tackle substance use disorders among veterans and develop a plan of action towards this objective. A portion of this effort should be advocating federal representatives on the need for the VA to allow Cannabis to be a course of treatment offered at VAMCs.

### Housing/Homelessness

- **Promote Development of Veterans Home at the Presidio:** The City should take steps, to include working with state elected officials, to designate underutilized barracks in the Presidio for development into a CALVETS State Veterans Home with a wing reserved for transitional housing, much like the Los Angeles State Veterans

Home. There is wide agreement and recognition that old barracks and other buildings in the Presidio of San Francisco are underutilized. Combined with the great need for both transitional and long-term veterans housing, as well as consensus that the number of seniors living on the streets is unacceptable, this is a viable and necessary option to consider.

- **Improve Data Collection on Veterans Housing:** The City should take a leading role in facilitating improved collaboration between the Department of Veterans Affairs, CALVETS, Swords to Plowshares and other nonprofits, SF Housing Authority, and the SF Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing. To start, the City should mandate reporting of relevant data points by City departments and contracted nonprofits to SF Open Data or another publicly available location. In order to better serve the veterans population in San Francisco, City leaders and policymakers need to easily and adequately understand of the share of the population in need of and receiving housing assistance, such as vouchers. Only with accurate and accessible data can data collection on veterans utilizing nonprofit homelessness assistance outside of the VASH voucher system be improved.
- **Engage SF Housing Authority During Reorganization:** The City should direct SF Housing Authority to designate a point of contact to engage with the VAC through the reorganization process. The Commission has an interest to engage the Housing Authority as it moves to streamline VASH and other housing funding stream assessment processes as a means to increase the share of supportive housing made available for veterans.
- **Take Action to Assist Reversal of Unjust Bad Paper Discharges:** Alongside continued support of Swords to Plowshares and other like non-profits, the City should develop legal clinics with local law schools (USF School of Law, San Francisco Law School, UC Hastings School of Law, etc.) as a means to rectify these historical injustices and ensure that veterans have access to all the privileges they earned by virtue of their service. Other-than-honorable discharges pose a common problem that disproportionately impacts African-American, Latinx, and LGBTQ veterans' eligibility for HUD-VASH vouchers. The circumstances of many discharges have been found to have roots in a long history of discriminatory military policy and practice towards racial minorities and LGBTQ personnel, often tied to indiscriminately harsh punishment for relatively minor offenses. Many veterans who received dishonorable or less-than-honorable discharges do not know how to appeal these decisions. They are often unaware or indifferent to the severe impacts these "bad paper discharges" have on their eligibility of many benefits and services.
- **Evaluate City and County of San Francisco Veterans Hiring Preference:** The City direct the Department of Human Resources to conduct an evaluation of the utilization of this program to determine if the City is doing all it can to provide opportunities for veterans to continue their service in local government. While the

City provides a veterans preference in its civil service hiring process, this process and the weight of service should be evaluated.<sup>14</sup>

## Employment/Workforce Development

- **Mandate Equity in Training and Education Programs:** The City should mandate, as a prerequisite to operation, that all such job training and workforce development programs track diversity enrollment and outcomes, as well as publish this data publicly to SF Open Data or in another publicly accessible manner. There are many job training, certification, and academic programs meant to provide critical skills and opportunities for veterans and transitioning service members. These programs often do not report completion or job placement rates that would inform veterans of how effective these programs are at increasing their employability. The lack of recruitment and marketing to women and minorities for specialized education, vocational rehab, employment security, and workforce development programs will only worsen existing gentrification in San Francisco. This recommendation will help ensure racial and gender equity of opportunity to quality jobs in emerging and growth sectors of the economy.
- **Ensure City College Workforce and Education Recovery Fund supports student veterans:** The Board of Supervisors approved the creation of the Workforce Education and Recovery Fund to provide support to City College. 25% of this yet-to-be funded pool is dedicated to supports students from historically under-represented or marginalized groups, to include student veterans. As this fund is appropriated dollars, it is crucial that City College fence off funding to support student veterans who often face institutional and personal challenges when engaging with higher education institutions that often do not fully understand the experiences and backgrounds of student veterans.
- **Apply Reciprocity for Department of Defense (DoD) Training Certifications:** The City Office of Economic and Workforce Development and Human Resources Department should ensure, where possible, that relevant DoD training certifications are given reciprocity. By providing reciprocity, the City would decrease the barrier to employment for veterans who possess tangible and applicable skills.
- **Improve Coordination with Department of Labor Veterans Training and Employment Services:** The San Francisco Human Resources Department should facilitate improved coordination and communications between the City and both the Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training Services Offices and the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Intergovernmental Affairs. These efforts will ensure the

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<sup>14</sup> <https://sfdhr.org/veterans-preference>

- **Establish Veterans Employment Resource Group:** In keeping with the Mayor’s No One Left Behind initiative, the San Francisco Human Services Agency should establish a Veterans Employment Resource Group to gather, analyze, and share resources and data from across the Federal, State, and Local governments, as well as nonprofit partners. With initial partnership between the Office of Economic and Workforce Development and Swords to Ploughshares, the Veterans Employment Resource Group should determine trends and gaps in local veteran employment that will inform policy makers. Accepting this recommendation can ensure that all veterans have access to high quality training and employment opportunities in the evolving regional economy.
  
- **Key Sectors in Economic and Workforce Development:**
  - **Veterans in Tech:** VAC will work to identify model and best practice programs to support and help grow (such as npower California), as well as ineffective or problematic initiatives (such as Vets in Tech).
  - **Veterans in Construction:** VAC will work with both the Office of Economic and Workforce Development’s City Build program<sup>15</sup> and Helmets to Hardhats<sup>16</sup> to encourage veterans to participate in apprenticeship and training programs in the ever expanding construction industry. Helmets to Hardhats to develop targets for veteran employment and apprenticeship.
  - **Veterans in Health Care:** The Department of Veterans Affairs is the largest integrated health care system in the country as well as the largest employer of veterans. The Veterans Health Administration also happens to be in the middle of a provider crisis. VAC should continue to find ways to encourage veterans to pursue careers in health care and service at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://oewd.org/city-build>

<sup>16</sup> <https://helmetstohardhats.org/>

## Veterans Affairs Commission Membership and Attendance

### **Executive Board:**

Victor Olivieri, Ph.D.,  
President

*Vacant*, Vice-President  
Courtney Miller,  
Secretary

### **Appointment**

BOS Seat #1 (of 12), term expires January 31, 2023.

BOS Seat #12 (of 12), term expires January 31, 2021.

BOS Seat #6 (of 12), term expires January 31, 2024.

### **Commissioners:**

George Ishikata

William Barnickel

*Vacant*

Deborah Dacumos

Stephen Martin-Pinto

Douglas Bullard

Hanley Chan

Matthew Brauer

Christopher McDonald

Raymond Wong

Ikram Mansori

Myles Tucker

Jeff Marshall

*Vacant*

BOS Seat #2 (of 12), term expires January 31, 2021.

BOS Seat #3 (of 12), 2nd term expires January 31, 2024.

BOS Seat #4 (of 12), 2nd term expires January 31, 2023.

BOS Seat #5 (of 12), 2nd term expiring January 31, 2022.

BOS Seat #7 (of 12), term expires January 31, 2023.

BOS Seat #8 (of 12), term expires January 31, 2023.

BOS Seat #9 (of 12), 2nd term expires January 31, 2024.

BOS Seat #10 (of 12), 2nd term expires January 31, 2022.

BOS Seat #11 (of 12), term expires January 31, 2023.

MAYORAL Seat #1 (of 5), term expires January 31, 2023.

MAYORAL Seat #2 (of 5), term expires January 31, 2023.

MAYORAL Seat #3 (of 5), term expires January 31, 2023.

MAYORAL Seat #4 (of 5), term expires January 31, 2023.

MAYORAL Seat #5 (of 5), term expires January 31, 2022.

VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION	1/14/20	2/11/20	3/10/20	4/28/20	5/12/20				9/8/20	10/13/20	11/10/20	Mtg Date		Annual Present	Annual Absent
	Jan Meeting	Feb Meeting	Mar Meeting	Apr Meeting	May Meeting	Jun Meeting SIP	July Recess	Aug Meeting SIP	Sept Meeting	Oct Meeting	Nov Meeting				
William Barnickel	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present				Present	Present	Present				
Matthew Brauer	Notified Absent	Present	Present	Present	Present				Notified Absent	Notified Absence	Notified Absence				
Douglas Bullard	x	x	Present	Present	Present				Present	Present	Present				
Christine Borgognoni	Notified Absent	Present	x	x	x				x	x	x				
Hanley Chan	Notified Absent	Present	Present	Present	Present				Present	Present	Present				
David Chasteen	Present	Present	Present	Notified Absence	Resigned Absent				Resigned Absent	x	x				
George Chewing	Notified Absent	Notified Absence	x	x	x				x	x	x				
Deborah Dacumos	Notified Absent	Present	Present	Present	Notified Absence				Absent	Absent	Absent				
Margo Ellis	Present	Present	Present	Present	Notified Absence				Present	Resigned Absent	x				
David Frommer	x	x	Present	Notified Absence	Resigned Absent				Resigned Absent	x	x				
George Ishikata	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present				Present	Present	Present				
Ikram Mansouri	Notified Absent	Present	Present	Present	Present				Present	Present	Present				
Jeff Marshall	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present				Present	Present	Present				
Stephen Martin-Pinto	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present				Present	Present	Absent				
Christopher McDonald	Present	Present	Present	Notified Absence	Present				Present	Present	Absent				
Courtney Miller	x	x	Present	Present	Present				Present	Notified Absence	Present				
Victor Olivieri	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present				Present	Present	Present				
Myles Tucker	Notified Absent	Present	Present	Present	Present				Present	Notified Absence	Present				
Raymond Wong	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present				Present	Present	Present				
<b>Commissioners Present</b>	9	15	17	14	13				13	10	10				
<b>Notified Absences</b>	7	1	0	3	4				1	4	1				
<b>Un-notified Absences</b>	0	0	0	0	0				1	1	3				