ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY VETERANS ASSISTANCE COMMISSIONS

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Veterans Assistance Commission reform bill passes state legislature, moves to Gov. Pritzker's desk

A Veterans Assistance Commission reform bill enacting changes to the state Military Veterans Assistance Act was approved unanimously by the Illinois Legislature in April.

HB 5184 clarifies the funding relationship between Illinois counties and statewide Veterans Assistance Commissions. Once enacted, the legislation should help resolve several lawsuits between veteran organizations and county boards related to the funding mechanism for Veteran Assistance Commissions.

In addition, the legislation gives county VACs sole control over the administration and distribution of funds to county veterans, thus eliminating the involvement by county boards into the funding of veteran issues.

Illinois State Rep. for the 84th District Stephanie Kifowit, a Democrat from Aurora and chief sponsor of the legislation in the Illinois House, is credited with providing bi-partisan support to assist Illinois veterans with the updated legislation.

"I was honored to work with the Illinois Association of County Veterans Assistance Commissions to update the current law," Kifowit said. "These changes will help Veterans Assistance Commissions to be more efficient and provide more services to address the needs of our Veteran community."

The amended act also cleans up language of the creation of veteran assistance commissions and provides a county having two or more congressionally chartered veteran service organizations to create a Veterans Assistance Commission to function as the central office for all veterans, their families and the families of deceased veterans.

Prior to the passage of this legislation, Illinois was 52nd in the nation in providing benefits to veterans despite having the 10th largest veteran population.

"This was a fantastic opportunity to resolve several long-standing issues between the counties and the Veteran Assistance Commissions," said 32nd District State Sen. Craig Wilcox, a Republican from McHenry. "There's no doubt this goes a long way to helping the VAC help our veterans. The legislature has worked

hard the last 10 years to help veterans, so this was a suitable time to fix these issues because the state legislative support is there."

After unanimously passing the state house and senate, the measure will be put forth to Gov. J.B. Pritzker to be signed into law in the weeks ahead. After the measure is signed, the provisions immediately correct the law to allow for more county initiatives through individual Veteran Assistance Commissions to directly deliver help to local veterans.

"This is a huge win for Illinois veterans who rely on county Veteran Assistance Commissions to provide needed food, shelter and clothing," said Andrew Tangen, President of the IACVAC. "With the signing of this bill into law by the Governor, there will never be a time when a county can secretly adjust or withhold funding to the men and women who have bravely put their lives on the line in defense of this country."