

THE LIGHTFIGHTER

Monterey County
Military & Veterans Affairs Office



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Director's Message: Welcome



Happy New Year! I hope that everyone had a safe and wonderful holiday season. This new year brings in some great new things. A couple of my personal favorites are; Blue Water Navy Vietnam veterans are now allowed presumptive conditions. This means that if a Blue Water Navy veteran served during Vietnam and was within 12 miles of Vietnam, they could be allowed service-connection for many different ailments ranging from ischemic heart disease and diabetes to several types of cancer. Beginning this year, disabled veterans will have commissary, PX and MWR access. What used to be reserved for retirees and 100% rated veterans is now open to all VA rated veterans. We also saw the Senate pass the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) with a vote of 86-8. This measure contains a provision that will completely eliminate the Survivor Benefit Plan/Dependency Indemnity Compensation (SBP/DIC) offset (known as the "widows tax") by January 2023. The bill now goes to the White House where the President is expected to sign it into law.

As this New Year kicks off, our office is looking to increase the percentage of veterans utilizing benefits through the VA. I ask each of you to refer veterans to our office to file initial claims or even file for secondary conditions or increases on conditions that have worsened. We as a veteran community should look out for one another. Let's work together to increase the number of veterans in our county accessing VA benefits.

Thank you for your service to our country.
Very respectfully,

Jason Cameron

Artwork by Chief Warrant Officer 2 Michael Fay: A Reserve Marine from Weapons Company, 2nd Bat, 25th Marine Regiment, operates a Multifunction Agile Remote-Control Robot (MARCOT) during a training exercise at Camp Wilson, 29 Palms, CA

Our Mission Statement:

The Monterey County Military & Veterans Affairs Office (MVAO) provides advocacy, assistance, and services designed to enhance the lives of the County's veterans who served their country in the Armed Forces, their families, and their survivors.

Office Locations and Hours

Monterey County Superior Courthouse	Salinas Life Foundation	Marina VA Outpatient Clinic	Hollister San Benito County
Monterey County Superior Courthouse	Salinas Life Foundation	Marina VA Outpatient Clinic	Hollister San Benito County
1200 Aguajito Rd, Suite 003 Monterey, CA 93940	1000 S. Main St, Suite 209A Salinas, CA 93901	201 9 th St Marina, CA 93933	649 San Benito St Hollister, CA 95023
(831) 647-7613	(831) 647-7613	(831) 647-7613	(831) 647-7613
Hours of Operation:	Hours of Operation:	Hours of Operation:	Hours of Operation:
Monday – Thursday 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. 1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.	Monday - Thursday 8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. 1:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.	Monday - Thursday 8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. 1:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.	Monday - Thursday 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. 1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Appointments only Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday	Appointments only Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday	Appointments only Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday	Appointments only on Thursdays
Walk-In Services on <u>Tuesday</u> Closed on Fridays	Walk-In Services on <u>Wednesday</u> Closed on Fridays	Walk-In Services on <u>Thursday</u> Closed on Fridays	Walk-In Services <u>Monday - Wednesday</u> Closed on Fridays



The End of SBP/DIC Offset



Tuesday, December 17th, the United States Senate passed the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) with a vote of 86-8. This measure contains a provision that will eliminate the Survivor Benefit Plan/Dependency Indemnity Compensation (SBP/DIC) offset by January 2023. The bill now goes to the White House where the President is expected to sign it into law.

Currently, purchased SBP annuities are offset by the amount of any benefit payable under the VA DIC program. SBP is not a government gratuity benefit; rather, it is a type of insurance purchased out-of-pocket by military retirees for their survivors while DIC is a VA benefit intended to provide spouses of veterans who died from a service-connected condition some semblance of financial security.

Upon the retiree's death, the SBP annuity is paid monthly to eligible beneficiaries; however, if a surviving spouse is also entitled to DIC, the SBP benefit is reduced by the amount of the DIC benefit. When DIC benefits are payable but the monthly rate is equal to, or greater than, the monthly SBP payment amount, beneficiaries lose the entire SBP payment. Thousands of survivors of military retirees are adversely affected by this unfair offset between SBP and DIC benefits.

The bill will remove the offset incrementally by one-third in January 2021, a second third in January 2022, and the final third in January 2023, thereby allowing surviving spouses to receive both the purchased SBP annuities and their earned DIC benefits. The law will not be retroactive-therefore, recoupment of offsets from previous years will not be provided.

Several Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) including DAV and MOAA lobbied heavily to end this "widow's tax".

(see full article here: <https://www.moaa.org/content/publications-and-media/news-articles/2019-news-articles/advocacy/nearly-70-senators-call-for-full-repeal-of-widows-tax-in-new-letter/>)

Veteran Employment Services offered by California EDD



The State of California Employment Development Department (EDD) assists veterans and their eligible spouses to maximize their employment and training opportunities. Veterans are entitled to many resources designed to help in their search for employment.

The EDD veterans' employment services primary objective is to develop and support programs that increase opportunities for veterans to obtain employment and job training in California.

Veterans are entitled to receive priority services in job referrals and referrals to training by EDD staff as well as other employment related services. Veterans with disabilities receive the highest priority in all employment services.

The veterans' employment service is a grant-funded program within the EDD's Workforce Services Branch. Each year, the U.S. Department of Labor-Veterans' Employment and Training Service awards the Jobs for Veterans State Grant to EDD to support the services to veterans provided by three principal staff positions:

- Disabled veterans' outreach program specialists (DVOP)
- Local veterans' employment representatives (LVER)
- Consolidate veterans' representative (CVR)

The DVOP and LVER staff at the local AJCC coordinate, along with partner agencies, a wide array of services including, employment services, job training, vocational education, supportive services, and participation in community college programs.

The local EDD Veterans Team hosts a Job Club on the 1st Thursday of each month at the America's Job Center of California at 730 La Guardia St, Salinas, CA 93905.

If you are a veteran job seeker, please contact our local DVOP and LVER at (831) 796-3656 or contact our office at (831) 647-7613 for additional information.



Dentistry for Vets



Our office was contacted by Dr. Hugo Ferlito (DDS) in April 2019. Dr. Ferlito was working in coordination with Dr. George Yellich to provide high quality / low cost dental services to veterans in Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Benito Counties. They understood that many of our local veterans are unable to access dental insurance through the VA or other sources and were in severe need of treatment and care for their teeth.

Through their efforts, the website www.dentistry4vets.org has been launched and plans are in place to open a clinic in Marina in early 2020. Local veterans who are unable to access dental services due to financial constraints, may contact Dentistry 4 Vets and complete an online application/registration form.

After applying and registering at Dentistry 4 Vets, veterans will be asked to complete an in-person interview to determine their eligibility and needs. Afterward, an administrator will schedule an appointment with a volunteer dental professional for treatment.

Dentistry4Vets is still in the development stages of their volunteer services and is already providing appointments and services to many local veterans.

We encourage all our veterans to be mindful of their dental care and explore the options available to access professional dentistry. The VA is working to improve access to dental care through the VA Dental Insurance Program (VADIP) and providers like Delta Dental and MetLife.

If you are interested in learning more about Dentistry4Vets, please contact their offices at (831) 744-VETS (8387).

MVAO Palo Alto Van Ride Program Volunteers are Needed Desperately!

Have you been looking for a way to contribute to the local veteran community that can make a HUGE difference and only takes a few hours one day each month?

We are asking able and willing citizens (veterans and non-veterans alike) in our community to volunteer just one (1) day per month to drive our disabled veterans to Palo Alto and back.

The County provides the van, the gas, the maintenance, the scheduling, and coordination. The only thing we are asking for is your time.

To volunteer as a van driver, the following is needed:

- A current copy of your DMV driving record
- A valid California driver's license
- The ability to be at the Monterey Courthouse by 6:30 a.m.
- The ability to drive to Palo Alto and return usually by 3:00 p.m.

Our current volunteer drivers will provide the training and ride along(s) to ensure you are confident and comfortable before driving on your own.

If you believe you can volunteer just one (1) day each month from 6:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., **please contact our Van Ride Coordinator, Michael McFadden at (831) 647-7614.**

This free van transportation is made available Monday through Friday for veterans to travel from Monterey County to the Palo Alto VA Clinic for appointments.

Veterans who are interested in using this free transportation service are asked to call **(831) 647-7614** to reserve a seat in advance for the date(s) of travel.

The van has three (3) pick-up locations in Monterey County:

Pick-up Locations:	Pick-Up Times:	Address
Monterey: Courthouse	6:30 a.m.	1200 Agujito Rd. Monterey, CA (Monterey Courthouse)
Sand City: McDonalds	6:45 a.m.	990 Playa Ave. Sand City (Costco Shopping Center)
Marina: Jack-in-the-Box	7:00 a.m.	221 Reservation Rd. Marina (Marina Village Shopping Center)
Salinas: Carls Jr. (Davis Rd.)	7:15 a.m.	1061 N. Davis Rd. Salinas (Next to Post Office)

Currently, this program is operated by fifteen (15) amazing volunteer drivers. **More volunteer drivers are desperately needed to continue to support this vital program.**