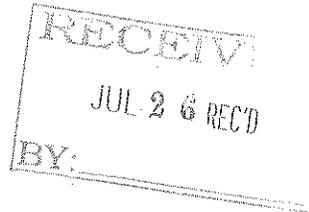




# Shasta County

## BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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July 19, 2016

The Honorable Gregory Gaul  
Presiding Judge, Shasta County Superior Court  
1500 Court St., Rm. 205  
Redding, CA 96001

Dear Judge Gaul:

**Re: Response of Board of Supervisors to Fiscal Year 2015-2016 Grand Jury Report**

The Shasta County Board of Supervisors appreciates the time and dedication which the 2015-2016 Grand Jurors contributed to their charge. The following findings and recommendations are under serious consideration and discussions are being held regarding solutions to any unresolved problems.

### RESPONSES AND FINDINGS

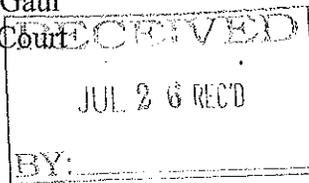
#### **A. Shasta County Veterans Services Office, Veterans' Lives Matter**

##### FINDINGS

*F1. The VSO is open limited hours and does not make appointments, restricting public access.*

**Response:** The Board of Supervisors disagrees partially with the finding. The VSO does not make appointments to meet with clients but staff is available from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. There are clients working with the Veterans Services Representatives from 8:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and 1:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Prior to the Grand Jury report the VSO has made and will continue to make special considerations to meet with clients outside these hours on a case-by-case basis.

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**F2.** *The VSO website lacks useful links and detailed and relevant information.*

**Response:** The Board of Supervisors disagrees partially with this finding. The Shasta County VSO website does contain detailed and relevant information. However, it does not contain any links. The lack of website links was meant to get clients into the Shasta County Veterans Service Office for comprehensive counseling by an accredited advocate. The Shasta County Veterans Service Office will update their website by December 31, 2016 to include links for veterans to request discharge papers online through the National Archive, as well as to the United States and California Department of Veterans Affairs websites.

**F3.** *Veterans potentially fail to receive benefits because some files in the VSO have not received follow-up from the VSO.*

**Response:** The Board of Supervisors disagrees wholly with the finding. The Shasta County VSO has had and continues to have follow-up procedures regarding veterans' benefits and their cases. Since January 2016, the Shasta County VSO has had no backlog. In addition, a veteran can file and view all movement of his or her claims on [www.ebenefits.va.gov](http://www.ebenefits.va.gov) 24-hours a day.

**F4.** *Veterans are not receiving all eligible benefits because there is not a comprehensive case management process in place.*

**Response:** The Board of Supervisors disagrees wholly with the finding. A comprehensive case management process will not cause a veteran to become eligible for benefits. The VSO staff ensures eligible veterans either are receiving or are in the process of receiving eligible benefits.

**F5.** *VSO staff performs tasks once done by Work-Study Program participants, limiting available time to help veterans with their claims.*

**Response:** The Board of Supervisors agrees with the finding. Prior to the Grand Jury report, the Shasta County VSO re-implemented the Veterans Affairs Work-Study Program and currently has two students assigned which allows staff to assist veterans.

**F6.** *The VSO eliminated outreach to Burney, causing Northeastern Shasta County Veterans to travel to Redding for assistance.*

**Response:** The Board of Supervisors agrees with the finding. However, prior to the Grand Jury report, the Shasta County VSO re-implemented its monthly outreach to Burney to serve the veterans in the northeastern areas of Shasta County.

**F7.** *Veterans potentially receive reduced level of service as a result of previous Veterans Services Officer's time spent out of the office.*

**Response:** The Board of Supervisors disagrees wholly with the finding. The veterans of Shasta County continued to receive services from the VSO staff during business hours.

**F8.** *Hiring Veterans Services Officers from outside Shasta County has created misgivings among local veterans.*

**Response:** The Board of Supervisors disagrees wholly with the finding. Shasta County recruits and hires qualified applicants to fill vacant positions.

**F9.** *Currently, only one employee in the VSO is accredited, limiting ability to assist veterans with claims.*

**Response:** The Board of Supervisors disagrees partially with the finding. Currently, two employees in the VSO are fully State accredited. A new Veterans Services Representative requires 9-12 months of training by law before they are eligible to test for the California DVA (CalVet) accreditation.

**F10.** *Failure of VSO staff to attend State of California training has resulted in decreased reimbursement to the County's General Fund.*

**Response:** The Board of Supervisors disagrees partially with the finding. Prior to the Grand Jury report the VSO sent two Veterans Services Representatives to the California Association of County Veterans Service Officer (CACVSO) Training Conference in February 2016. In addition, staff will also attend the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO) Training Conference in June 2017. This enables Shasta County to receive the \$12,000.00 per year training funds from CACVSO.

**F11.** *The Shasta County – County Executive Officer failed to provide adequate oversight of the VSO during changes in leadership, potentially contributing to substandard caseload follow-up and poorly managed office.*

**Response:** The Board of Supervisors disagrees wholly with the finding. The County Executive Officer provided and continues to provide adequate oversight of the VSO. Retired Veterans Service Officers Bob Dunlap and David Lanford returned to the VSO on an interim basis to assist the veterans of Shasta County during the transition of Veterans Service Officer.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

**R1.** *The Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors direct the County Executive Office to stagger current VSO staff start, end, and break times to allow hours of operation to include lunch, evening, and occasional weekend day by September 30, 2016.*

**Response:** The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. Prior to the Grand Jury report, attempts to stagger the Shasta County VSO staff proved to be unsuccessful. Shasta County VSO clients prefer to see the same Veterans Services Representative (VSR) during the process of their claim and benefit counseling. In addition, the California Department of Veterans Affairs agrees and highly recommends not having multiple VSRs working with PTSD/Military Sexual Trauma victims. Further, it is anticipated that CalVet is transitioning the claims process to a paperless operation by December 31, 2016. The Shasta County VSO business hours should correlate with the CalVet's hours of operation, Monday through Friday.

**R2.** *The Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors direct the County Executive Officer to implement a system by September 30, 2016, that will offer veterans the option of scheduling an appointment to meet with VSO staff.*

**Response:** The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. Prior to the Grand Jury report, attempts in scheduling appointments to serve veterans proved to be inefficient. A standard appointment system would reduce staff availability to veterans and reduce funding from the California Subvention program. Walk-ins allow the VSO to handle 30 or more cases per day rather than the 24 cases per day with appointment scheduling, which does not allow for

mandatory training, community outreach and assisting homeless veterans. By Shasta County operating on a walk-in basis, veterans are afforded the opportunity to complete each case in one visit preventing backlog.

Most California County VSOs that have implemented an appointment program schedule 50 minute visits per client. Those same offices are closed to clients on Fridays to complete their administration and training requirements.

**R3.** *The Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors direct the County Executive Officer to update the Shasta County VSO website to include links to Federal and State of California Veterans benefits pages and National Archives by December 31, 2016.*

**Response:** This recommendation will be implemented by December 31, 2016.

**R4.** *The Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors direct the County Executive Officer to immediately implement a system to review all open, pending, and denied claims to ensure all are reviewed by September 30, 2016.*

**Response:** The recommendation has been implemented. Prior to the Grand Jury report, the VSO re-established policies to review all open, pending and denied claims. Suspense dates are established in the VetPro system for staff to follow-up on all open/pending claims at four months for pensions and one year for compensations from the date the claim was submitted. The VSO follows-up monthly thereafter. The current VA Fully Developed Claims processing time for compensations is approximately 8-14 months. Upon notification of a denied claim, the staff notifies the client to come in to start the appeals process, if the client prefers to proceed. The client has one year from the date of the denied claim letter to provide new evidence for service-connection. The appeals process may take up to ten or more years. The VSO assists the claimant throughout the entire process.

**R5.** *The Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors direct the County Executive Officer to implement within the VSO by September 30, 2016, a comprehensive case management process that will provide consideration for all eligible benefits available to Veterans, including burial and survivor benefits.*

**Response:** The recommendation has been implemented. Prior to the Grand Jury report the VSO implemented a procedure for following up with veterans on their cases. The Shasta County VSO has had no backlog in over six months. In addition, the veteran/applicant can view his/her claim anytime on [www.ebenefits.va.gov](http://www.ebenefits.va.gov).

**R6.** *The Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors direct the County Executive Officer to reinstate the Work-Study Program and posting a link to the Program Application on its website by December 31, 2016.*

**Response:** The recommendation to reinstate the Work-Study Program has been implemented. Prior to the Grand Jury report the VSO implemented the VA work-study program and currently has two students assigned. As for posting a link to the Program Application on the VSO website, that recommendation requires further analysis as to the benefits of posting such a link and will be considered by the Veterans Service Officer and the County Executive Officer by December 31, 2016 when updating the VSO website as indicated in the response to Recommendation R3.

**R7.** *The Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors direct the County Executive Officer to post notice and re-establish consistent and regular monthly outreach to Burney by December 31, 2016.*

**Response:** The recommendation has been implemented. Prior to the Grand Jury report the Burney outreach program was re-established. The VSO is available to serve the veterans of northeastern Shasta County on the third Friday of every month, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., at the Intermountain Community Center.

According to the VA, Burney has 360 of the 19,463 Shasta County veteran residents and to date, 102 Burney residents have qualified for and utilized VA services. During many of the Burney outreach trips, the VSO had no contact or claims processed. The VSO has also implemented advertisements through multiple media outlets (radio, TV, social media, both Chamber of Commerce, medical clinics, VFW) in Burney and Fall River to attract more veterans to utilize our services.

**R8.** *The Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors direct the County Executive Officer to ensure the Veterans Services Officer focuses on the functions of the office rather than attending non-vital community events.*

**Response:** The recommendation has been implemented.

**R9.** *The Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors direct the County Executive Officer to establish a hiring process by December 31, 2016, that will provide for encouraging and considering the applications of local qualified veterans when hiring Veterans Service Officer.*

**Response:** The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. Shasta County has had and will continue to have an equal employment opportunity hiring process for all positions. When a position becomes available, persons may apply regardless of their residential region so that the County has the opportunity to consider hiring the most qualified individual. To establish a hiring process that would indicate preferential treatment based on local residency would unnecessarily limit the County's ability to consider qualified applicants and may expose the County to potential litigation.

**R10.** *The Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors instruct the County Executive Officer to monitor progress of all newly-hired staff, including the Veterans Services Officer, to ensure anyone assisting veterans with claims will be accredited within one year of hire.*

**Response:** The recommendation has been implemented. During transition of the Veterans Service Officer, retired Veterans Service Officer Robert Dunlap and retired Veterans Service Officer David Lanford returned to the VSO on an interim basis to assist in the transitions, trainings and peering of new staff and to assist the veterans of Shasta County.

**R11.** *The Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors direct the County Executive Officer to initiate a plan by September 30, 2016, for all VSO staff to attend available State of California trainings on an ongoing basis.*

**Response:** The recommendation has been implemented. Shasta County Veterans Services Representatives attended the February 2016 California Association of Counties Veterans Service Officers Training Conferences and will be attending the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers Training Conference in June 2017.

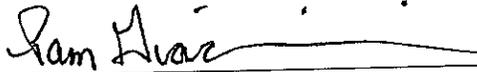
**R12.** *The Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors immediately instruct the County Executive Officer to take a more proactive supervisory role over the new Veterans Services Officer.*

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**Response:** The recommendation will not be implemented as it is not warranted. Prior to the Grand Jury report the County Executive Officer has taken and will continue to take a proactive supervisory role over the Veterans Service Officer consistent with his supervisory oversight of other County Department Heads as authorized by law.

This concludes the responses of the Shasta County Board of Supervisors to the FY 2015-2016 Grand Jury Report, The Shasta County Veterans Services Office, Veterans' Lives Matter.

Sincerely,



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PAM GIACOMINI, Chairman  
Board of Supervisors  
County of Shasta