

ARKANSAS VETERANS' HOME TASK FORCE REPORT OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

October 10, 2013

Act 38 of 2013 created the Arkansas Veterans' Home Task Force and this report of activities and recommendations is submitted to the Arkansas Legislative Council, the House Committee on Aging, Children and Youth, Legislative and Military Affairs, and the Senate Committee on State Agencies as required by the act.

The task force was comprised of the following legislative members: Senator Jane English, Senator Bobby J. Pierce, Senator Jim Hendren, Representative John Charles Edwards, Representative Kim Hammer, and Representative George B. McGill. The non-legislative members serving on the task force are: Mr. Paulino Acosta, Jr., Mr. Miles Brown, Mr. Terry Callahan, Ms. Mary Erdman, Mr. Mike Hampton, Ms. Cissy Rucker, Mr. Bob Schoenborn, Mr. Tom W. Thomas, Mr. Ronnie Anderson, Ms. AnnaMarie Atwood, Ms. Jane Benton, Mr. Joseph Didden, Mr. Steve Gray, Ms. Patricia Herring, Ms. Anne Laidlaw, and Mr. Bob Moody

The Task Force met on the following days: June 6, July 9, August 5, September 12, and October 10 at 10:00 a.m., in Room 149 of the State Capitol. At the first meeting, Senator English was selected to serve of the chair of the task force.

Under Act 38 of 2013, the task for was responsible for:

- Studying issues related to opening a new Arkansas Veterans' Home or homes and developing specific recommendations for review, consideration, and implementation by the General Assembly.
- Evaluating the following issues:
 - A needs assessment to evaluate the:
 - Number of current and future Arkansas veterans who have a need for such a facility; and
 - Extent of services to be offered by any Arkansas Veterans' Home or homes.
 - The location or locations for facilities, to include an evaluation of:
 - Whether existing facilities are available to meet the needs of the act; and
 - Possible locations for new facilities;
 - The cost of design and construction of new facilities or of utilizing existing facilities; and
 - The manner and method of funding remodeling or new construction.

The act also requires the Task Force to determine who are the veterans in Arkansas and their needs, as it investigates the criteria for a new veterans' home. After the criteria are developed, proposals will be accepted for the veterans' home or new building.

The task force heard from members of interested groups including the Arkansas Veterans' Commission, the Arkansas Veterans' Coalition, the Central Arkansas Veterans' Healthcare system, the Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs, and Senator John Boozman's office. Mr. Steve Gray, U.S.

Senator John Boozman's Office, stated that, as he sees it, the Task Force is in a position to consider five major areas as relates to the veterans' home:

- Choosing a director
- Choosing a location
- Determining the design and physical size of building
- Deciding the payment options (Medicaid, per diem (federal), private pay or a combination)
- Determining the extent of care (long-term, day drop, additional ancillary area, etc.)

The task force also discussed additional items that needed to be considered in recommending a site location for the new veterans' home. Included in these considerations are:

- Levels of care.
- Occupancy level.
- Source of funding.
- Medicaid and Medicare eligibility of residents (residents must meet Medicaid medical eligibility requirements for Medicaid/Medicare certified nursing homes).
- Will the focus be on the veterans that are Medicaid/Medicare eligible.
- Will private pay veterans be admitted.
- Will it be a residential care facility or an assisted living facility (an option for veterans that are not Medicaid eligible). Residential care facilities are strictly private pay; a limited number of Medicaid waiver slots are available for assisted living care.
- The many challenges to design and manage a facility safely and provide a high quality of life.
- Facilities need to be vibrant communities where residents can live.

During discussion, the task force heard that, based upon current projections, Arkansas will need approximately 653 beds for veterans by 2020. The state currently has 108 beds in Fayetteville with a census of approximately 78 beds; however, this number is predicted to increase. The task force determined that it was interested in looking at all types of facility designs to ensure the best decision is made for the veterans in Arkansas and to ensure that the facility is manageable.

The task force put out a request for site proposals for consideration by the task force. As a result of the request for site proposals, more than 30 site proposals were received for review. A selection committee was created to narrow the proposals down to 5 locations for full consideration by the task force. In addition, upon a final determination of the 5 locations, the task force would participate in site visits.

Upon completion of the review of the site proposals, the selection committee selected 4 locations for site visits. These locations were: Benton; Fort Smith; Jacksonville; and Russellville. The Task Force visited these site locations on August 19, 2013, and August 21, 2013.

The task force also discussed the funding of the veterans' home and it was informed that the state matching-funds document was submitted on July 17, 2013, and also informed that any remaining documentation must be submitted by the December 1, 2013 deadline, including without limitation, finalized building plans/inspections; application timeline for other areas of the application; and hiring a design team.

The task force recognizes that while a significant amount of work was completed by the task force, many questions still must be addressed and continued involvement is necessary to ensure that the selection of the site for the veterans' home takes into consideration the interests and well-being of the veterans of Arkansas. Therefore, the task force recommends that the Arkansas Legislative Council create a Veterans' Home Subcommittee to be comprised of five House members and five Senate members. This subcommittee could then continue to the review process of the Arkansas Department of Veterans' Affairs site selection. The co-chairs would select the chair of the subcommittee and the subcommittee would expire on January 31, 2015.

Respectfully submitted,

Senator Jane English, Chair