



## **Department of Veterans Affairs**

### **Testimony of Commissioner Thomas J. Saadi Appropriations Committee February 23, 2021**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, ranking and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony and appear before you to speak about the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) and the Governor's proposed budget.

The mission of the DVA is "Serving Those Who Served" and with those four words comes a great responsibility, as it is only because of those who served and those who continue to serve in our armed forces that we are able to live in this free and democratic nation. I thank our Veterans and current Service members across our state and nation for their service and sacrifice.

At the DVA we continue to update programs, procedures and facilities to better deliver our four core services of long-term skilled nursing care, residential and rehabilitative services, benefits advocacy and assistance and cemetery and memorial services to our Veterans and Service members. We have accomplished this in challenging fiscal times and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic due to the hard work of the DVA staff, a great partnership with the Federal VA and support from other state agencies including the CT National Guard. We also have been operating in accordance with detailed DVA COVID-19 mitigation protocols since March of 2020.

Since I last testified before this committee on the fiscal years 2020 and 2021 budget, the DVA successfully completed the transition of our Chronic Disease Hospital to a Skilled Nursing facility which was among the most complex and broad programmatic updates the DVA has undertaken in decades in order to provide Veteran focused long-term skilled nursing care to our aging state Veteran population. We are modernizing the living quarters in the Residential program without additional appropriations through donations, in-kind services and internal reallocation of available resources. We continue to look for opportunities to develop and expand partnerships with federal, state and local agencies and non-profits as well as with our statewide Veteran Service Organizations to pool resources, coordinate efforts and expand supportive services for Veterans without the need for additional appropriated funds.

The Governor's proposed biennium budget provides the DVA with the appropriated funding necessary to carry out the DVA's four core functions through fiscal years 2022 and 2023, with anticipated structural adjustments to expenditures from the DVA Institutional General Welfare fund. That said, the challenge we currently face is reconnecting with Veterans across the state who may benefit from the Skilled Nursing and Residential programs at our Rocky Hill Campus. The DVA has capacity to serve nearly 100 additional Veteran Residents and Patients and additional families at our Campus. Therefore, we are exploring web based options, virtual community net-working resources and increased direct community engagement to facilitate the admission of Veterans to these programs. We know there is a growing need in the community for these programs particularly as federal Cares Act funds expire for short-term lodging and care options.

I thank you for your time and your service to our state and I am glad to respond to any questions.