

## Summary of Remarks at VVA Women Veterans Breakfast by Pamela JB Luce, 1SG, US Army (Retired)

- Advocates must have commitment, collaboration, and innovation.
- One of the challenges of assisting women veterans is that in any given community our numbers are relatively small, even among today's returning combat veterans.
  - Federal and state governments are unlikely to commit great financial resources exclusively toward women veterans programs.
  - We work primarily within the systems created for all veterans, molding and adjusting them to meet the distinctive needs of women.
- Establish a collaborative relationship with
  - State director of veterans affairs
    - Works for Governor (generally)
    - Must balance political agenda of Governor with need to work bipartisan for the overall good of the veterans
  - State program managers
    - State Veterans Nursing Homes (emergency cases, visits, activities, programs – medals and shadow boxes)
    - State Veterans Cemeteries (eligibility for interment, percentage of women veterans interred, homeless veterans laid to rest)
    - States Benefits Operation (state employees, county service officers, contract with VSOs)
      - Already established network of communication and coordination
      - Training opportunities
    - Special Programs
      - Homeless Program (non-profit organizations, shelters, special funding available to prevent homelessness)
      - Women's Program (SWVC; coordinating committee; health committee; groups for domestic violence, trauma, PTSD, substance abuse for women veterans)
      - Seamless Transition (DOD, DD214s)
      - Trust Fund
- A meeting with the director might be an excellent opportunity for your state council to advocate on behalf of Vietnam veterans, bringing your concerns to the table where strategies are being developed to prioritize and address veterans' issues within your state.
- Use NASDVA website as a resource to find the point of contact within the state for specific benefits and services available to veterans.
- Most states have a website

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- Many states have a publication that sums state/federal benefits available and more importantly, who to contact.

### State Women Veterans Coordinators (SWVC)

- Often fulfill this role as an additional duty, so the time and effort given to the program varies widely
- Ensure women veterans in respective state have equal access to federal and state veterans benefits and services as male veterans
- Serve on the Women Veterans Health Committees at the VA hospitals in state
- Might chair a women veterans coordinating committee that
  - Assess programs and services for women and for women veterans in the state
  - Make recommendations to the Commissioner to improve or create programs
  - Plan, organize, and execute events and programs for women veterans
- Collaborate with
  - Women Veterans Coordinators from the VA Regional Offices
  - Women Veterans Program Managers from VA Medical Centers
  - Trauma counselors from Vet Centers
  - State Senators and Representatives
  - Veteran Service Organizations
  - City government
  - County Judge Executives
  - Military history museums
  - Military Affairs (National Guard and Reserve units)
  - Non-profit organizations that serve women (shelters, rape-counseling centers, shelters for domestic violence victims)
- Heighten awareness of women veterans' issues by presenting at Veterans Service Officer training events
- Testify to state legislators
- Help VSOs locate and recruit women veteran members
- Work with other SWVCs to reach out to women veterans as they cross state lines (National Association of State Women Veterans Coordinators)

Collaboration with state department of veterans' affairs may facilitate collaboration with other state agencies

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- Transportation – veterans license plates, disabled tags, Gold Star Mother tags, women veterans license plate (characterization, war era, disability)
- State Employment (lots of room for improvement in state laws)
- Social Services – suspected cases of elder abuse, social security
- DOL – employment offices, DVOPs, LVERS
- Corrections – incarcerated women veterans
- Education Cabinet - tuition waiver, veterans education
- Commission on Women
- State Mental Health resources (research regarding care giving and social support for women veterans)

### Returning women combat veterans

- How are you doing?
- How much time do you have for yourself?
- Take the kids...

I believe there are certain things every state could be doing to ensure receiving veterans' benefits and services isn't an accident of geography. We can do that best by collaborating innovatively with every entity we can find that is truly committed to helping veterans. I salute you for your efforts over the past nearly 30 years to aggressively advocate on behalf of America's veterans. You have affected legislative and programmatic change, you have improved people's perceptions of Vietnam veterans, and you have served your communities well. Thank you for your selfless service both during your active duty and today, and thank you for your dedication to our women veterans.

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