



Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

ANNUAL REPORT

2019

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Halifax

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Honourable Kevin Murphy
Speaker
House of Assembly
Province House
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Dear Mr. Speaker:

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, I am pleased to submit the Annual Report of the Committee for the period from January 15, 2019 to June 18, 2019 of the Sixty-third General Assembly.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rafah DiCostanzo'.

Rafah DiCostanzo, MLA,
Clayton Park West
Chair
Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

Halifax, Nova Scotia
2019

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INTRODUCTION

The Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, an all-party committee of the House of Assembly, was struck at the beginning of the Second Session of the Sixty-third General Assembly, pursuant to Rule 60(1) of the *Province of Nova Scotia Rules and Forms of Procedure of the House of Assembly*.

Although there is no written mandate for the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, this report was written with the understanding that the committee is established for the purpose of considering matters pertaining to veterans of the Canadian Armed Forces and the Royal Canadian Legion.

MEMBERSHIP

There shall be no more than nine Members of the Legislative Assembly appointed to this Committee. The current membership of the Veterans Affairs Committee is as follows:

Ms. Rafah DiCostanzo, MLA (Chair)
Clayton Park West

Ms. Barbara Adams, MLA
Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage

Mr. Ben Jessome, MLA (Vice Chair)
Hammonds Plains-Lucasville

Ms. Kim Masland, MLA
Queens-Shelburne

Mr. Brendan Maguire, MLA
Halifax Atlantic

Ms. Lisa Roberts, MLA
Halifax Needham

Mr. Bill Horne, MLA
Waverley-Fall River-Beaver Bank

Ms. Tammy Martin, MLA
Cape Breton Centre

Mr. Hugh MacKay, MLA
Chester-St. Margaret's

MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

As of July 31, 2019, Barbara Adams, MLA (Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage) replaced Hon. Alfie MacLeod, MLA (Sydney River-Mira-Louisbourg) as a member of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

PROCEDURES AND OPERATIONS

The Veterans Affairs Committee traditionally meets once a month. These meetings are held on the third Tuesday of the month in the Legislative Committees meeting room, Granville Level, One Government Place.

NOTICES, TRANSCRIPTS AND REPORTS

NOTICES

Notices of committee meetings are sent to all members of the committee, caucus office staff, legislative staff and Communications Nova Scotia. The notices are also posted in Province House and on the Nova Scotia Legislature website at the following address:

<http://nslegislature.ca/index.php/calendar/>

TRANSCRIPTS

Transcripts of all Veterans Affairs Committee meetings are available from the Legislative Library in Province House, the Legislative Committees Office, or on the Veterans Affairs Committee web page at the following address:

http://nslegislature.ca/index.php/committees/committee_hansard/C11/

REPORTS

All reports of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs are compiled by the Legislative Committees Office and forwarded to committee members for consideration. Upon completion of the review and approval of the report, the Chair tables the report with the Speaker of the House of Assembly or with the Clerk of the House of Assembly.

Distribution of the report is as follows:

To the Speaker or the Clerk of the House of Assembly; committee members; all witnesses who appeared before the committee; the Nova Scotia Legislative Library; the caucus offices; and the media. This report is also available to the general public upon request from the Legislative Committees Office and is available on the Veterans Affairs Committee web page at the following address: <https://nslegislature.ca/legislative-business/committees/standing/veterans-affairs/reports>

RESEARCH MATERIAL

Research material for the Veterans Affairs Committee is compiled by the Legislative Library in consultation with the committee clerk. Research material is compiled in an electronic format and is distributed by the committee clerk prior to the meeting to members, staff and witnesses.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The committee wishes to extend its gratitude to all witnesses for their time and co-operation. Special appreciation is extended to the Legislative Committees Office; Hansard Reporting Services; Legislative Television and Broadcast Services and the Nova Scotia Legislative Library.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

WITNESSES

There were no witnesses present during this meeting.

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

The committee met to discuss some housekeeping details and to organize their list of topics and witnesses.

The committee agreed to keep the same time and day. That being the third Tuesday of the month from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm.

They also agreed to accept the past correspondence and annual report of the previous committee. The 2018 Annual Report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs was sent to all current committee members for review and will be signed by the Chair at the next committee meeting.

The committee agreed to and passed a motion on the following topics:

- PAWS Fur Thought
- VETS Canada – Tour of Duty Walk
- Military Family Resource Centre – Shearwater

- Supports for Commonwealth Veterans
- Canadian Youth Remembrance Society

- Federal underspend on veteran’s benefits and impact on local veterans

The committee agreed to combine the Supports for Commonwealth Veterans and the Federal underspend on veteran’s benefits and impact on local veterans under the one witness – Veterans Affairs Canada.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Correspondence

The committee agreed to and accepted the following correspondence sent previously:

Response from the Federal Minister of Veterans Affairs Canada regarding the short timeline for the Veterans Emergency Transition Services Canada (June 19, 2018, meeting).

Response from the Nova Scotia Health Authority regarding information requested from the June 19, 2018, meeting: Nova Scotia Health Authority Client Experience Survey and Veterans Affairs Canada contract Long-Term Care Beds operated by NSHA.

WITNESS

Paws Fur Thought Program

Mike Gingell - Steering Committee Chair

Kim Gingell - Intake Coordinator

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

Five years ago, PAWS co-founder found out about the service dog program in the United States, particularly a school in Kansas called CARES (Canine Assistance Rehabilitations Education & Services). Medric Cousineau, through the Royal Canadian Legion, Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command, travelled to Kansas to obtain the very first service dog in Nova Scotia.

To pay it forward, Mr. Cousineau decided to do a “Long Walk to Sanity” (a walk from Eastern Passage, Nova Scotia to Ottawa, Ontario) to pair 50 veterans with 50 service dogs. It was at that point Paws Fur Thought was created.

Over the last five years PAWS has done a lot to promote service dogs, national standards, and dealing with supply and demand issues. PAWS primary mandate currently is to assist military and RCMP veterans with PTSD-related operational stress injuries in Atlantic Canada. PAWS has collaborated with Wounded Warriors Canada - who now has a service dog program - and five other service dog providers who look after pairing dogs with veterans west of Ontario.

Some constraints PAWS is facing, currently, is supply and demand. A lot of the training schools may only be able to provide three to five well-trained dogs per year. PAWS are fortunate to get 12 dogs a year. Funding is another constraint. PAWS works through fundraising and receives support from the Legion through its Benevolent Fund and Poppy Fund, Wounded Warriors Canada, and others, but have not received any funding from government.

Furthermore, the Royal Canadian Legion, who has been looking after PAWS finances so they can issue tax receipts as part of a non-profit charitable organization, limits PAWS responsibility to Nova Scotia and Nunavut only. Therefore, PAWS cannot use any for the Benevolent Fund/Poppy Fund monies to fund service dogs in any other province. PAWS can only fund dogs outside Nova Scotia through the funding from Wounded Warriors Canada.

One of the things PAWS is trying to achieve is to become a separate entity as a non-profit charitable organization. They will still have the same funding support and level of support from current organizations but will not have the same financial mandate constraints that they now have.

Education is key in their organization. Service dogs perform tasks related to a patient's disability. Nova Scotia now has legislated a test for qualifying a service animal. These dogs can go anywhere and are trained in certain behavioural standards. They are trained for a specific task. For example: pairing a dog with a veteran who has early-stage Parkinson's and PTSD, pairing for autism, diabetic alerts, seizures, mobility, etc.

Statistically, since 2012, PAWS has sponsored or paired 114 service dogs with veterans. They have also sponsored other schools in Canada such as BC and Alberta Guide Dogs; national Service Dogs in Ontario, Les Chiens Togo in Quebec and CIAD (Canadian Intervention and Assistance Dogs) on the South Shore of Nova Scotia. CIAD's mandate is a bit different as its goals are to pair first responders with service dogs as part of their healing and treatment more so than just veterans.

Currently, PAWS have 28 veterans and RCMP waiting for a service dog. The average waiting time is about 18 to 24 months.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The committee decided not to meet during all sessions of the House of Assembly.

The committee accepted the past report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs and has given permission for the Chair to sign the report on behalf of the committee.

Correspondence

The committee agreed to and accepted the following correspondence from the previous committee:

The committee received correspondence from VAC regarding the Veterans Memorial Center Society's proposal for an Operational Stress Injury Clinic. Minister Wilson-Raybould followed up from her predecessor, Minister Seamus O'Regan from, past correspondence of February 20, 2018. The committee accepted the correspondence without discussion.

DOCUMENTATION

The committee received information from Mr. Mike Gingell (PAWS):

Various studies on the Efficacy of service dogs in military veterans with PTSD by Purdue University and by Veterans Affairs Canada sponsored through Laval University

SUPPORTS FOR COMMONWEALTH VETERANS & THE IMPACT OF FEDERAL DEPARTMENT UNDERSPEND

May 21, 2019

WITNESSES

Veterans Affairs Canada

Sandra Williamson - Senior Director, Health Care Programs, Service Delivery Branch
Sherry Spence - Director of Financial Operations, Chief Financial Officer, Corporate Services Branch

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

Over 90 per cent of Veterans Affairs Canada's budget goes directly to programs and benefits to veterans and their families health and well-being, transition to civilian life, and support for families.

Some recent programs and supports implemented by Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) include:

Pension for Life program. As of April 1, 2019, Veterans with service-related illnesses or injuries are now able to receive a monthly pension for life. This pension includes recognition and compensation for disabilities related to their military service.

VAC has significantly increased support for ill and injured veterans. In 2017, the maximum disability award rose from \$300,000 to \$360,000. Also, the Earnings Loss Benefit was increased to 90 per cent of a veterans indexed salary at the time of release.

On April 1, 2018, VAC introduced the Caregiver Recognition Benefit - \$1,000 per month tax free, indexed annually, and paid directly to the caregiver. For members with complex needs, a case manager helps coordinate transition planning with the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Canada who work closely together to ensure integrated transition support.

In 2018, VAC introduced the re-designed Career Transition Services program to help CAF members and veterans identify careers they may be suited for. Qualified career counsellors advise about labour markets, help prepare resumés, develop job search and interview skills and, in some cases, help with job placements.

Through the Education and Training Benefit, veterans can also access funding for tuition to pursue post-secondary education or technical training. Veterans with at least six years of service can be eligible for up to \$40,960, and those with more than 1 year of service are eligible for as much as \$81,920.

VAC has also ensured access of families to the Veteran Family program at all Military Family Resource Centres for veterans who were released medically. This helps families to settle in their new community while retaining their connection to the military community.

There is also a range of physical and mental health services available. A network of 11 Operational Stress Injury clinics and eight satellite services sites across the country deliver services where veterans need them. Case managers can refer veterans and families to provincial and community mental health professionals across Canada. Assistance is also offered through VAC's assistant service which offers 24/7 toll-free telephone support and access to psychological counselling and other services.

The new Veterans Emergency Fund, established in April of 2018, allows VAC to provide emergency financial support to veterans, their families, and survivors due to urgent and unexpected situations. It is short-term relief while VAC works to identify any long-term needs and possible solutions.

VAC also works with and help fund organizations across the country that have the skills, local connections and commitment to assist. The Veteran and Family Well-Being Fund is another example of their national approach. Through grants or contributions, the Government of Canada supports private, public or academic organizations in conducting research and implementing initiative and projects that support the well-being of veterans and their families.

In response to what they heard from veterans, VAC re-opened nine area offices as well as another new office. They have increased outreach and hired significantly more staff, including more case managers, and began scheduled outreach visits to northern communities.

Every veteran and family member receive benefits and services for which they are eligible. No veteran is ever turned away from the benefits and services they are entitled to, due to their service.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The Chair announced the next meeting date of June 18, 2019, which is the date of the provincial bi-election. There was some discussion, however, no objections were made. Therefore, the committee will be meeting with its scheduled witness on June 18, 2019.

DOCUMENTATION

The committee requested the following information:

- Information on locations that are experiencing a larger increase or influx of applicants for disability benefits
- Information with respect to commemoration and Canada Remembers activities and initiatives
- With respect to the satellite service work, details on how those mental health services are provided

The committee received information from Mr. Mike Gingell (PAWS) from the February 19, 2019 meeting:

- Various studies on the Efficacy of service dogs in military veterans with PTSD by Purdue University and by Veterans Affairs Canada sponsored through Laval University

AN OVERVIEW OF HALIFAX & REGION MILITARY FAMILY AND RESOURCE CENTRE (SHEARWATER)

June 18, 2019

WITNESS

Halifax & Region Military Family Resource Centre (Shearwater)

Shelley Hopkins - Executive Director

Trish Dominie - Veteran Family Program Coordinator

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

The Halifax & Region Military Family Resource Centre (MFRC) was the first resource centre established in 1986. Nationally, there are now 32 MFRCs. MFRCs exist to help the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) be mission ready. Although it is mainly for family support, at the end of the day it ensures the ability for CAF members to do their job on the assurance that their family is cared for, and that the number of repatriations that were happening be reduced.

MFRC provide a lot of services to support information and programs to families. They have an incredible partnership with CAF leadership, and are responsive to military operations.

MFRC's main goal is creating awareness that they are a non-profit organization and are not DND-funded federal employees. Families can have an arm's-length connection with the chain of command and decide for themselves what programs and services they need to meet their needs. All 32 MFRCs deliver some mandated services and some local unique needs and they put their own local dollars into funding those needs.

Funding is provided by Military Family Services (national funding), with some provincial funding that is mostly associated with the two childcare centres, and consist of provincial grants, provincial wage subsidies, summer camp grants that they apply for.

They also receive funding from both the Navy and Air Force bases. These restricted funds are used for specific spending principles. Fundraising is one of the opportunities where they have a lot of flexibility to expand or augment services they are already providing.

The three key tenets they are working towards are to be responsive to the current challenges that families deal with; not to duplicate services that are already available in the community; and evaluation and performance measurement of programs and services to make sure they are responsive and relevant.

Any family member of the military member is a family member for MFRC, whether it is a partner, parents of the members, the veteran family or grandparent who raised them. MFRC will provide service to that person if that is the person the member identifies with.

Halifax & Region Military Family Resource Centre (Shearwater) is the largest MFRC in the country who serve all three elements - Army, Navy, and Air Force, and the Reservists. They are responsive to local trends, health care, employment, youth, francophone services, et cetera, and are often engaged in many different pilot programs and projects such as the Maple Virtual Health program and the Veteran Family Program.

Due to their large geographical footprint, Halifax & Region MFRC has made investments in virtual programs and other technologies for outreach requirements to families. They also have a military representative in each of the units as a way to reach the member to reach the family with information.

They are the only MFRC that operates a 24-hour information line mainly because of the back-to-back operations of the Navy here; and are the only MFRC that has a Padre who works out of their location several times a week.

Military families manage mobility separation or absences, and risk. The programs and services offered support relocation through community integration and transition; connecting families and decreasing social isolation, deployment by creating opportunities for people to meet each other and share the unique components of the military lifestyle; and risk, illness, injury and casualties are a real risk that military families face.

A large part of what they do is community integration. They have an entire team of staff who concentrate on information and referral and connections for families to different resources in the community plus they have four family counsellors on staff. There are no waiting lists. People can see a counsellor within 24 hours.

Maple Virtual Health program was established to allow families access to immunizations, specialist referrals and prescription medication. Before this program, most families ended up having to return to their previous province where they had a family doctor to receive ongoing treatment because they could not get the specialist referral here.

With the Maple Virtual Health Program families obtain a one-year membership which allows them to log in or call in and speak to a doctor. It deals with basic health, basic diagnoses, and enables families to get access to a specialist referral and have prescription renewals. As for immunizations, Public Health was contacted, and some inroads were made in terms of getting information to give to families about where they could get those services.

In the Veteran Family Program, inclusion, volunteerism and family engagement are the key pieces. The Veteran Family Program is funded by VAC to deliver the parameters of this program. This program offers support for families once the spouse is released from the military. Upon release, all services end, this program does allow families to continue with services because now they are a veteran family member.

The program is now in every MFRC in the country, and has been highly successful, based on the partnership building within the community. They all have access to mandated services such as mental health services.

Another helpful service offered by MFRC is their short-term accommodations which consist of six apartments through the Canadian Forces Housing Authority and the base. These are available for supporting families through short-term stays, whether it is veterans coming from Cape Breton to receive medical support at hospitals, or families bringing their sick children to the Isaac Walton Killham (IWK) hospital, etc.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

It was suggested that the committee extend its time at its next meeting to discuss the issues of allowing spouses to stay with each other at Camp Hill even if they have been approved for long-term care. Hon. Alfie MacLeod referred to the story of John and Irene McCabe not being allowed to live together at Camp Hill although non-vets can occupy beds.

Lisa Roberts, MLA, said Veterans Affairs Canada mentioned, at a previous meeting of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, that there is no reason why the spouses cannot stay at Camp Hill, except the province will not and does not pay for long-term care beds at the facility.

Ben Jessome, MLA, said there are mechanism for them to be together outside of Camp Hill. Spouses are approved to be together at other facilities.

After the discussion the following motion was put:

Motion

“That this committee look into the possibility of making it easier for a veteran and their spouses to be together in facilities that they need to be in. If that is Camp Hill, then that is Camp Hill “.

By: Hon. Alfie MacLeod, MLA
Sydney River-Mira-Louisbourg

Motion: Carried

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - MOTIONS

The following is a list of motions put forth by the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs:

January 15, 2019

The committee agreed to and passed a motion on the following topics:

PAWS Fur Thought

VETS Canada – Tour of Duty Walk

Military Family Resource Centre – Shearwater

Supports for Commonwealth Veterans

Canadian Youth Remembrance Society

Federal underspend on veteran's benefits and impact on local veterans

June 18, 2019

“That this committee look into the possibility of making it easier for a veteran and their spouses to be together in facilities that they need to be in. If that is Camp Hill, then that is Camp Hill “.

By: Hon. Alfie MacLeod, MLA
Sydney River-Mira-Louisbourg

Motion: Carried

APPENDIX B – CORRESPONDENCE

The following is a list of the correspondence received by the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs:

January 15, 2019

The committee agreed to and accepted the following correspondence sent previously:

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Response from the Nova Scotia Health Authority regarding information requested from the June 19, 2018, meeting: Nova Scotia Health Authority Client Experience Survey and Veterans Affairs Canada contract Long-Term Care Beds operated by NSHA.

February 19, 2019

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APPENDIX C - DOCUMENTATION

The following is a list of documentation requested and received by the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

February 19, 2019

The committee received documentation from Mr. Mike Gingell (PAWS) from the February 19, 2019 meeting:

Various studies on the Efficacy of service dogs in military veterans with PTSD by Purdue University and by Veterans Affairs Canada sponsored through Laval University

These are the studies sent:

- Frontiers in Veterinary Science (Abstract)
- Aanderson Service Dog Prescriber Guidelines 2.0
- BC Guide Dog Service Dog Assessment
- Draft Standards for PTSD Service Dog Instructors
- Laval Service Dog Participants Report
- NS Service Dog Assessment
- The effects of service dogs for individuals with physical disabilities or chronic conditions
- Service Dog Study (February 2019)
- Service Dogs
- What is a Service Dog

May 21, 2019

The committee requested the following information:

- Information on locations that are experiencing a larger increase or influx of applicants for disability benefits
- Information with respect to commemoration and Canada Remembers activities and initiatives
- with respect to the satellite service work, details on how those mental health services are provided

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