



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

2019 DEC -2 AM 11:46

CLERK OF THE BOARD
OF SUPERVISORS

NATHAN FLETCHER
SUPERVISOR, FOURTH DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: December 10, 2019

21

TO: Board of Supervisors

**SUBJECT
LEAVE NO VETERAN BEHIND (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

OVERVIEW

Every year the United States deports an unknown number of veterans. The exact number is unknown because the Department of Homeland Security doesn't record the veteran status of deportees. However, a report titled "Discharged, then Discarded" released in 2016, estimate the number to be in the thousands. As someone who spent a decade in the United States Marine Corps, I believed all who served honorably were automatically granted citizenship. I was wrong. When enlisting in the military, recruits do not have to be U.S. citizens. While it's often the case that recruiters use the prospect of becoming a citizen to attract new recruits from immigrant communities, joining the military does not guarantee citizenship, though many service members are told routinely that it does. Despite being entitled to citizenship, the Department of Defense does not have a systematic approach to notifying these veterans of their rights or the process.

Earlier this year our Board unanimously supported Veterans Moving Forward, a program to assist incarcerated veterans with reentry into society. Through this action, we demonstrated that when our veterans are struggling, we support a path to rehabilitation and redemption.

Honorably discharged veterans leave the military and return home often suffering Post-Traumatic Stress and if left untreated can find themselves acting out, which can lead to an offense with the law. However, after they pay for the crimes they committed, they are given an additional punishment by being deported. While the County cannot reverse their deportation, we can help ensure they receive the military benefits they are due.

I strongly believe that if these veterans cannot return our country, they should at least live with the dignity and the respect that they deserve through these services. Citizenship is not something that can be granted by the County of San Diego, but the County can assist these veterans with accessing services they are eligible for through the Department of Veterans Affairs based on their military service. The County provides services through veteran service officers (VSOs) to veterans region-wide through the Office of Military and Veteran Services since 1987. The Vet Connect Program uses VSOs co-located at County libraries in unincorporated areas where veterans are assisted with

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claims, referrals to public assistance, Veterans Administration medical care, Government Issued (GI) Bill, and many more services.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

SUPERVISOR NATHAN FLETCHER

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to research the feasibility of expanding a Vet Connect station with secure internet connection in Tijuana, Mexico, at the Deported Veterans Support House including hosting online office hours for veterans who need assistance in filing benefits, and report back in 90 days.
2. Direct the CAO to identify funding for equipment, installation and training for this new Vet Connect site.

FISCAL IMPACT

N/A

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

Since the founding of our nation, immigrants have served honorably in the United States Armed Forces honorably. They are a part of a select group who are willing to pay the price for everyone else — those who take an oath, leave their homes and are willing to give their life for their country.

Every year the United States deports an unknown number of veterans. The exact number is unknown because the Department of Homeland Security doesn't record the veteran status of deportees. However, a report titled "Discharged, then Discarded" released in 2016, estimate the number to be in the thousands. As someone who spent a decade in the United States Marine Corps, I believed all who served honorably were automatically granted citizenship. I was wrong. When enlisting in the military, recruits do not have to be U.S. citizens. While it's often the case that recruiters use the prospect of becoming a citizen to attract new recruits from immigrant communities, joining the military does not guarantee citizenship, though many service members are told routinely that it does. Despite being entitled to citizenship, the Department of Defense does not have a systematic approach to notifying these veterans of their rights or the process.

Earlier this year our Board unanimously supported Veterans Moving Forward, a program to assist incarcerated veterans with reentry into society. Through this action, we demonstrated that when our veterans are struggling, we can show them a path to rehabilitation and redemption.

Honorably discharged veterans leave the military and return home often suffering Post-Traumatic Stress and if left untreated can find themselves acting out, which can lead to an

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offense with the law. However, after they pay for the crimes, they committed but then are given an additional punishment by being deported. While the County cannot reverse their deportation, we can help ensure they receive the military benefits they are due.

If the service members can't or don't complete the arduous immigration process, they are not granted citizenship. Anyone who is willing to fight and die for this country, regardless of their citizen status, should never be so cruelly discarded. Instead, they should be rewarded for their service and sacrifice by providing access to benefits they are entitled to.

Hector Barajas, a formerly deported veteran, founded a non-profit called the Deported Veterans Support House also known as "The Bunker" seven years ago and currently serves as its director. Since its founding it has served more than 500 veterans deported to over 57 different countries with services such as housing and administrative benefits. Hector Barajas has single handedly provided the services of a Veteran Service Officer, therapist, shelter manager, veterans advocate, case manager, social worker and has been broadly featured in the *LA Times*, *New York Times*, and other national publications. He has attracted the attention and aid of members of Congress, the California State Legislature and local San Diego elected offices. Hector manages a series of events and fundraisers annually with the intent to continue helping affected veterans and their families.

Citizenship is not something that can be granted by the County of San Diego but the can assist these veterans with accessing services they are eligible for through the Department of Veterans Affairs based on their military service. The County provides services through veteran service officers (VSOs) to veterans region-wide through the Office of Military and Veteran Services since 1987. The Vet Connect Program uses VSOs co-located at County libraries in unincorporated areas where veterans are assisted with claims, referrals to public assistance, Veterans Administration medical care, Government Issued (GI) Bill, and many more services.

In order to ensure deported veterans obtain needed services they are entitled to, I am requesting the Chief Administrative Officer Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to research the feasibility of expanding a Vet Connect to Tijuana, Mexico, including hosting office hours for veterans who need assistance in filing benefits, and report back in 90 days and identify funding for equipment, installation and training for this new Vet Connect site.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

The requested action supports the Live Well San Diego Initiative in the County's 2019-2024 Strategic Plan, and its vision for a San Diego that is Building Better Health, Living Safely and Thriving, by supporting veterans who fought for our country and serving those who served this country.

Respectfully submitted,

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nathan Fletcher". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

NATHAN FLETCHER
Supervisor, Fourth District

ATTACHMENT(S)
Click here to enter text.

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AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION SHEET

REQUIRES FOUR VOTES: Yes No

WRITTEN DISCLOSURE PER COUNTY CHARTER SECTION 1000.1 REQUIRED

 Yes No

PREVIOUS RELEVANT BOARD ACTIONS:

N/A

BOARD POLICIES APPLICABLE:

N/A

BOARD POLICY STATEMENTS:

N/A

MANDATORY COMPLIANCE:

N/A

ORACLE AWARD NUMBER(S) AND CONTRACT AND/OR REQUISITION NUMBER(S):

N/A

ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT:

OTHER CONCURRENCE(S):

CONTACT PERSON(S):

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E-mail

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Name

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Phone

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E-mail