



# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

## AGENDA ITEM

### BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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First District

DIANNE JACOB  
Second District

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Third District

NATHAN FLETCHER  
Fourth District

JIM DESMOND  
Fifth District

**DATE:** March 10, 2020

**06**

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

### **SUBJECT**

**RECEIVE THE FEASIBILITY STUDY TO EXPAND THE VET CONNECT PROGRAM TO THE DEPORTED VETERANS SUPPORT HOUSE LOCATED IN TIJUANA, BAJA CALIFORNIA, MEXICO AND DIRECT THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER TO BEGIN PROGRAM PLANNING TO IMPLEMENT THE PROGRAM (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

### **OVERVIEW**

The San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board) is committed to providing enhanced resources and supportive services to local veterans. On April 30, 2019 (20), the Board approved formal support of California legislative proposals aimed at enhancing services to assist veterans with successful reintegration into civilian life. Additionally, on October 15, 2019 (3), the Board approved implementation of Community Care Coordination to assist justice-involved veterans with reintegration back into their communities of origin throughout San Diego County.

The County of San Diego (County) Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA), Office of Military and Veterans Affairs (OMVA) provides services to veterans and their families throughout the San Diego region. In 2015, OMVA partnered with the San Diego County Library and established Vet Connect, a secure video teleconferencing system located at designated County libraries, to provide greater accessibility to resources for active duty military, veterans, dependents and survivors living in rural areas of the region.

On December 10, 2019 (21), the Board directed the Chief Administrative Officer to research the feasibility of expanding a Vet Connect station with secure internet connection in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico, at the Deported Veterans Support House (The Bunker) and report back in 90 days. A feasibility study was conducted in collaboration with HHSA, the County Technology Office, the County information technology vendor and The Bunker. This study looked at the feasibility of technology infrastructure, services, and finances under a variety of options and scenarios. Based on this study, it was determined that it would be feasible to implement a Vet Connect station in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico at The Bunker.

Today's item requests the Board receive the feasibility study to expand the Vet Connect program to Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico, at the Deported Veterans Support House. In addition, staff seeks the Board's approval to take the next steps to establish a Vet Connect station at The Bunker

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in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico. Today's action supports the County's *Live Well San Diego* vision by promoting the health and well-being of veterans.

**RECOMMENDATION(S)**

**CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER**

1. Receive the feasibility study to expand the Vet Connect program to the Deported Veterans Support House (The Bunker) located in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico.
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to begin implementation of establishing a Vet Connect station at The Bunker in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

Funds for this request are available in the Fiscal Year 2019-21 Operational Plan in the Health and Human Services Agency (HHS). If approved, today's recommendations could result in estimated costs and revenue of \$27,000 in Fiscal Year 2019-20 and costs and revenue of \$4,000 in Fiscal Year 2020-21. HHS will use existing available appropriations funded with General Purpose Revenue. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

**BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

N/A

**ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT**

On February 8, 2020, the feasibility study to establish a Vet Connect station at the Deported Veterans Support House located in Tijuana, Mexico was presented as an informational item to the San Diego Military and Veterans Advisory Council.

**BACKGROUND**

The San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board) is committed to providing enhanced resources and supportive services to local veterans. On April 30, 2019 (20), the Board approved formal support of California legislative proposals aimed at enhancing services to assist veterans with successful reintegration into civilian life. Additionally, on October 15, 2019 (3), the Board approved implementation of Community Care Coordination to assist justice-involved veterans with reintegration back into their communities of origin throughout San Diego County. The County of San Diego (County) Health and Human Services Agency (HHS), Office of Military and Veterans Affairs (OMVA) provides services to veterans and their families throughout the San Diego region. In 2015, OMVA partnered with the San Diego County Library and established Vet Connect, a secure video teleconferencing system located at designated County libraries, to provide greater accessibility to resources for active duty military, veterans, dependents and survivors living in rural areas of the region. Vet Connect allows for remote conferencing with a Veterans Services Representative from OMVA for assistance with completing applications for benefits and obtaining information and referrals for services. Additionally, OMVA Veterans Services Representatives

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help veterans liaise with federal, State and local agencies. The Vet Connect stations are currently installed in six County libraries with two additional stations scheduled to open in 2020.

While most veterans are thriving members of the community, it is well known that due to complex issues experienced in service, a number of veterans enter into the justice system and require additional support and resources to support their ability to find long-term stability and self-sufficiency. For those veterans who require additional support and do not have U.S. citizenship, there is a possibility they may be deported. Deportation alone does not affect a veteran's eligibility to receive benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs, however, deported veterans living abroad face challenges with accessing certain benefits and services.

On December 10, 2019 (21), the Board directed the Chief Administrative Officer to research the feasibility of expanding the Vet Connect program with secure internet connection to Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico, at the Deported Veterans Support House (The Bunker) and report back in 90 days. The Bunker was established in 2013 and provides basic needs and support to deported veterans to help them become self-sufficient. Since its founding, The Bunker has served more than 500 deported veterans. Because Tijuana and San Diego County are geographically adjacent, there are veterans being served at The Bunker who reside in Tijuana and/or who currently have dependents in the region.

A feasibility study was conducted in collaboration with HHSA, the County Technology Office, the County Information Technology (IT) vendor, and the Deported Veterans Support House. This study looked at the feasibility of technology infrastructure, services, and finances under a variety of options and scenarios.

**Development of a Vet Connect station with secure internet connection in Mexico at The Bunker is feasible.**

*1. Technology Infrastructure - Feasible*

Staff have performed an initial analysis to determine whether it is feasible to develop a Vet Connect station with secure internet connection across the border in Mexico with similar capabilities to existing Vet Connect stations in County libraries. In order to create this secure connection, a variety of options were explored, including:

- a. Leveraging the County's current contract with the existing IT vendor.
- b. Soliciting proposals for a new IT vendor.
- c. Pursuing a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with The Bunker where The Bunker obtains IT equipment independent of the County.

Based on the analysis, working with the County's existing IT vendor may be the best option as the vendor is currently providing support to the Vet Connect program and therefore, has the

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technical experience to allow for quicker implementation. During the feasibility study, the current IT vendor was engaged and expressed interest in providing these services.

*2. Services - Feasible*

As described above, the services provided by Vet Connect include remote teleconferencing with a Veterans Services Representative from OMVA for comprehensive benefits counseling, assistance with completing applications for benefits and obtaining information and referrals for services. Veterans Services Representatives are able to provide these services to veterans across the border with the establishment of the technology resources at The Bunker. Providing this service would require a physical workstation, desktop computer, secure internet access, videoconferencing software, All-in-One Printer/Scanner/Fax and a videoconferencing headset.

*3. Finances - Feasible*

Establishing a Vet Connect station with secure internet connection in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico, at The Bunker would provide access to veterans services to the 4,500 veterans living in the Baja California region, regardless of citizenship status. While work is ongoing in determining the most effective way to deliver services, it is estimated that this project could cost the County up to \$27,000 in Fiscal Year 2019-20 and an estimated \$4,000 in ongoing costs annually beginning in Fiscal Year 2020-21.

**Further Action Required**

Today's item requests the Board receive the feasibility study to expand the Vet Connect program to Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico, at The Bunker. In addition, staff seeks the Board's approval to implement the establishment of a Vet Connect station at The Bunker in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico. If approved, staff will begin necessary programming planning including completing an IT infrastructure plan and exploring additional community partnerships. The County and The Bunker would enter into an agreement detailing the roles and responsibilities for each entity.

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**LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN**

Today's proposed action to receive the feasibility study to expand Vet Connect to Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico supports the Building Better Health and Living Safely strategic initiatives in the County of San Diego's 2020-2025 Strategic Plan by promoting the health and well-being of deported veterans.

Respectfully submitted,



HELEN N. ROBBINS-MEYER  
Chief Administrative Officer

**ATTACHMENT(S)**

Attachment A – Feasibility Study to Expand the Vet Connect Program to the Deported Veterans Support House Located in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico

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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:**

December 10, 2019 (21), Leave No Veteran Behind; October 15, 2019 (3), Approval of the Community Care Coordination for Veterans Implementation Plan for Successful Reentry; April 30, 2019 (20), Support for Effective Veterans Services Legislation (AB 55, AB 808 and AB 1588).

**BOARD POLICIES APPLICABLE:**

Board Policy A-111, Data/Information and Information Systems

**BOARD POLICY STATEMENTS:**

N/A

**MANDATORY COMPLIANCE:**

N/A

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

N/A

**ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT:** Health and Human Services Agency

**OTHER CONCURRENCE(S):**    County Technology Office

**CONTACT PERSON(S):**

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