

# Veterans In Corrections

## Senate Select Committee on the California Correctional System

Tuesday, November 9, 2004

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I. **Introduction:**

Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen of the Senate Select Committee on the California Correctional System.

It is an honor to be called before you to testify on the subject of Veterans in Corrections.

My name is William Waltz, and I am a Staff Services Analyst for the Department of Corrections, at San Quentin State Prison. I am also the Veterans Information Project Coordinator, and a proud sponsor of the Vietnam Veterans Group of San Quentin.

I myself am a retired Navy Veteran who served my country during the Persian Gulf War and liberation of Kuwait City while serving with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division Camp Pendleton as a Hospital Corpsman.

II. **Background:**

Due to my Veterans status I was immediately drawn to begin working with the Veterans Group in early 2001. I began by sponsoring fund drives to raise money for the groups charitable causes, helping with sponsored socials and being an advocate for veterans incarcerated at San Quentin.

My role quickly moved from being a supporter of the program to becoming an official sponsor of the program, and ensuring the projects the veterans were conducting at the time, and those projects they wished to pursue, were presented effectively to the administration at the institution to continue implementation of veterans projects.

III. **Programs:**

San Quentin facilitates three veteran related programs:

1. **Vietnam Veterans Group of San Quentin**

- A. The first program began in 1987 with the formation of the Vietnam Veterans Group of San Quentin (VVGSO). Although the group is called the Vietnam Veterans Group, it was decided early on the group would follow the rules of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and accept members of other wars/conflicts into their group.



- B. It was later determined as a prerequisite for membership in the group, all group members must be honorably discharged. This was done so outside agencies would provide services to group members, whereas before this change, Veterans organizations did not wish to participate with veterans incarcerated whose membership included other than honorably discharged veterans.
- C. In 1988 the VVGSQ was awarded a charter with the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) Chapter #247, which has since dissolved, and the membership was absorbed into VVA Chapter #563.
  - 1. VVA is the nations largest and most successful Vietnam veteran's organization and the only Vietnam veteran's organization chartered by congress.
  - 2. VVA has long sought to improve the conditions of Vietnam veterans and their families, including veterans who are incarcerated. VVA's underlying philosophy for doing outreach to veterans incarcerated is that many reach this state due to circumstances that may be directly attributed to their military service.
- D. In 1998 the veterans group became involved with the National Veterans incarcerated Network (NIVN). The group continues to network through the NIVN with 33 veterans groups in 50 states across the nation.
  - 1. The National Veterans Incarcerated Network, Inc. (NVIN), focus is directed toward the full restoration of all Veteran Rights and Benefits particularly those presently serving time in an American Prison.
  - 2. Many of our Veterans could not find the help they needed before they became incarcerated, so this organization now works to unify the full restoration of all rights for those incarcerated.
- E. In 2000, the VVGSQ received a charter from the Veterans of the Vietnam War Inc. (VVnW) receiving Charter #CAI-01, thus becoming the first incarcerated chapter of this national organization in the state of California.
  - 1. The VVnW Inc. is a Pennsylvania non-profit corporation that was formed for the purpose of improving the social, charitable, and educational programs and benefits for all veterans, and their dependents. This applies to veterans of both the United States of America and its Allied Forces.

2. The incarcerated groups mission is to form posts in prisons that will become a service organization. They will actively address the post-incarceration needs of its members, lobby for enactment of legislation that confer with various State and Federal agencies, and have a responsibility for the delivery of services.
  3. Because of the charter, the VVGSQ is eligible to operate as a non-profit organization under the umbrella of the VVnW. This occurred as a result of a proposal titled 'Operation 72 Hours'. The first seventy-two hours are the most critical period for a veteran recently paroled from prison. The objective of this program is to provide services such as housing, transportation, food, and medical care.
- F. From its inception the VVGSQ has a long history of charitable donations. To date, the group has donated over \$31,000 to various charities. These charities include the Muscular Dystrophy Association, the Vietnam Veteran's Women's Memorial, Hooked on Phonics, Abused Women's shelters, Child Abuse Program, and the American Cancer Society.
1. However the most remarkable donation the VVGSQ contributes to is the annual VVGSQ Scholarship Award.
  2. This scholarship was established to award a child of a veteran a one-time stipend/scholarship of \$1,500 for college. Members of the group, their families, and the group sponsors/families are not eligible for the awards.
  3. In June of 2004, after a successful scholarship banquet the group elected to establish another stipend titled "Inspirational Award". This award is to acknowledge that some of the essays for the scholarship program are so good that it dictated another award to be established. This award is now called 'The Mary Manley Award' in recognition of the first recipient.
  4. The scholarship banquets in this unique setting serves to inspire and promote dialogue with veterans incarcerated that can be the catalyst for reflection and healing by all those involved.
- G. Finally, the VVGSQ has a long history of helping all those incarcerated at San Quentin during Christmas, as well as donating gifts to Marin Abused Women's Services (MAWS) and other charitable agencies through the Annual Christmas Toy Program. In 2004, the Annual Christmas Toy Program became an official function of VVGSQ.



1. The main idea for the program was to make the holiday as special as possible and to give a sense of normalcy to the children of the incarcerated men at S.Q.
2. An average of eight prisoner Elves, including a Santa, work to pass out gifts in the visiting room. Approximately 150 to 200 children receive gifts every year, with cash and toy donations exceeding \$10,000 per year.

**2. Veteran's Issues Group:**

A. In 1998 the Veterans Issues Group was formed following a seminar held at San Quentin attended by the Veterans Administration, the North Bay Vets Center, and members of the VVGSQ. This program was designed to assist inmates with issues derived from military service and incarceration.

1. Under the direction of professional staff, individualized, comprehensive, and integrated services are provided to veterans for the purpose of successful reintegration into society. The VIG program reaches veterans incarcerated with viable programs for reentering society, and to assist group members in contacting various resources to accomplish these objectives.
2. Due to limited resources, active participants are limited to 15 persons. This program is administered through a series of 27 individual programs developed specifically for veterans incarcerated. VIG has evolved into a comprehensive program that is administered on three levels.

**LEVEL I:** Provides participants with basic information about their military status and directs them to address their needs.

**LEVEL II:** Offers program participants the opportunity to participate in individual and group counseling for personal and re-adjustment problems. Participants may obtain assistance in addressing other needs such as medical treatment for military related problems, vocational and educational training, employment, and community reintegration planning.

**LEVEL III:** Offers participants ongoing group counseling through 27 individual programs. This is provided to address their personal readjustment and parole plans. Participants are pre-enrolled at this time to enter specific veteran programs in the community.

3. The VIG is a structured therapeutic setting where veterans participation is designed to address the veterans incarcerated' needs. This includes helping to address the past and future actions of the veterans incarcerated. These structured programs include anger management, victim awareness, coping skills, understanding themselves/self-esteem, advanced communication skills, parenting, and recovery from substance abuse after care.
4. The objective is for the VIG participant to continue to develop skills necessary to live a crime free lifestyle, while continuing to develop skills necessary to secure employment and to maintain self-sufficiency, with the ultimate goal to reenter society.
5. Since the first VIG program was established with CDC, the VIG groups outside sponsors have facilitated weekly workshops. These benefits assist the specialized veterans programming which continue to foster success. To date eight (8) non-lifers and two (2) lifers have been paroled and have not returned to prison.

X 3. **Veterans Information Project:**

- A. San Quentin State Prison opened a Veteran's Information Project (V.I.P.) office in April 2002. The V.I.P. office was created after San Quentin received the Deputy Director memorandum 53/01: Dissemination of Information Regarding Veterans Benefits.
  1. The mission statement for this project requires the VIP office to provide veterans incarcerated in San Quentin State Prison all possible information regarding benefits available by virtue of their service in the Armed Forces. The goal of this project is to provide encouragement through positive contact, to ease transition back into society, and to reduce the recidivism of former members of the Armed Forces.
- B. The V.I.P. Office falls under the Education Department. The office has a program coordinator and one prisoner clerk. The V.I.P. clerk meets with approximately 50% of those veterans arriving at San Quentin. Each Veteran is given a copy of the Federal and State benefit books and a form that will enable them to receive their DD-214 discharge papers, a list of services and contact addresses in their county of residence, and a 10-10 EZ Form for enrollment in the VA health care system.
  1. Surveys were conducted to determine the approximant veteran population at San Quentin. The first survey concluded that 10.8%



of the general population is veterans, while the second survey concluded 11.9 % of the general population were veterans.

- a. It should be noted that this survey was conducted using three methods.
  1. One survey was completed in Receiving and Release (R&R) with daily results of 1.3% of those inmates received being veterans. However, it should be noted that not all those surveyed were willing to participate due to their unwillingness to inform the Department of Corrections of their veteran's status.
  2. A survey was conducted in the Gym of those inmates during the same period the R&R survey was completed. However, fellow veterans conducted this survey instead of Correctional Officers, with a result of 4.3%. It should be noted that not all inmates from R&R are housed exclusively in the Gym, but in other blocks at the facility as well.
  3. Another survey was conducted with our North Block population, which is considered part of our General Population. Fellow veterans, with the assurance of confidentiality, conducted this survey. The inmate population was much more willing to release their veteran status to fellow inmates, compared to the survey completed in R&R by staff.
  4. While a complete survey of the institution, and its entire population has been approved, it has yet to be completed. It is from these two surveys completed in North Block and the Gym that we have determined approximately 9.2% of the population are veterans.
- C. When an veteran incarcerated has a question, they fill-out a Request for Service form, and the V.I.P. clerk will research the files and all available resources to provide the information requested. The VIP Coordinator will also make contacts with various outside agencies to obtain the requested information.
- D. This project has received help from the Department of Veteran Affairs, San Francisco VA Medical Center, the Program Director for Homeless Veterans in

San Francisco, North Bay Vets Center, Swords To Plowshares, Marin County Veterans Service Officer (VSO), and the San Francisco VSO.

E. San Quentin has hosted two "Mini Stand Downs" in conjunction with the San Francisco V. A. Medical Center. Services provided during these two stand downs include:

1. Hepatitis C education and awareness
2. Housing Services
3. Diabetes education and awareness
4. Veterans Benefits Available
5. Smoking Cessation awareness
6. Member Services
7. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder education

IV. **Expansion of Outreach:**

1. **Why should the Department of Corrections provide outreach to those veterans incarcerated?**

A. In reference to the report prepared by Claudia Baker, Ph.D. and Joseph Ruzek, Ph. D. in the Veterans Incarcerated Outreach Training Manual, the authors ask, "Why should the V. A. provide outreach to the veterans incarcerated?"

1. For our purposes today, we should be asking why should the Department of Corrections provide outreach to those veterans incarcerated?
  - a. As the authors of the Veterans incarcerated Outreach Training Manual state, "Combat Veterans appear to be particularly at risk for incarceration and other types of contact with the criminal justice system. The number of veterans incarcerated is likely to increase in the coming years as the criminal justice system in the United States expands at a record rate."



- b. Also as major conflicts continue to plague our society, it can be expected that those combat veterans returning from their assignments will have an increased rate of contact with the criminal justice system.
- c. As shown in past conflicts, it can be expected that those veterans who are incarcerated will have an increased need for psychological treatment and other various benefits the V. A. offers to service personnel.

B. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, published January 2000 by the U.S. Department of Justice, there were 225,700 veterans held in the Nations prisons or jails. Since 1985, the number of U.S. Veterans has declined by nearly 3 million. However, the number of veterans incarcerated rose 46%. Veterans accounted for 12% of all inmates (nationally) in 1998, down from 21% in 1985.

- 1. The report also concluded that veterans were more likely than others to be in prison for violent offenses compared to drug related offenses.
- 2. Veterans in State prisons reported higher levels of alcohol abuse, yet lower levels of drug abuse, compared to other prisoners.
- 3. Nearly 60% of veterans incarcerated served in the Army.
- 4. 1 in 5 veterans incarcerated saw combat duty during their service.
- 5. Among state Prisoners, veterans have less extensive criminal histories than non-veterans.
- 6. Veteran's sentences averaged 3 years longer than other State prisoners.
- 7. Veteran's incarcerated inmates were more likely to report a mental illness.

**2. Statewide implementation of the Veterans Information Project:**

A. It is my belief that there is an overwhelming need for the Department of Corrections to establish a Veterans Information Project throughout every prison in the State of California. Currently, there are only three Veterans Groups within the Department of Corrections, and very few marginal veterans programs within the department.

- 1. This project provides veterans incarcerated an opportunity to address their specialized needs within the correctional facility.
- 2. This project further provides veterans incarcerated the opportunity to develop an awareness of their benefits, entitlements, resources, and incorporate them into their community re-integration plans.

3. This project allows the veteran to enroll in V. A. health care system as well as provide them the necessary means to upgrade discharges, and obtain information required to establish disability claims.
  4. Further it allows the veteran to pre-qualify into transitional housing upon release from prison, and obtain continued substance abuse therapy, and other various counseling services.
    - a. Examples of transitional housing include:
      1. Swords to Plowshares, Treasure Island, California
      2. Vietnam Veterans of San Diego, San Diego California
      3. The Ward House – A Veterans Recovery Project, Redding, California
- B. It would also be extremely beneficial to establish a Veterans Issues Group (VIG), under the coordination of the VIP Coordinator, in all State Prisons for the purposes of implementing intense therapeutic programs that cover all chemical dependencies, mental health issues, violence, as well as personal and re-adjustment problems. Participants may obtain assistance in addressing other needs such as medical treatment for military related problems, vocational and educational training, employment, and community reintegration planning.
1. This program should be based on the twenty-seven-part VIG program currently being facilitated at San Quentin State Prison.
  2. It is recommended that participants in the VIG program be allowed to reside together in each facility to foster a cohesive therapeutic community, and to participate as a community in substance abuse treatment, military experience related chemical dependency, aggression counseling, and personel enhancement.

V. **Implementation of Program:**

- A. In the “Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Act of 2001”, enacted by the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress, Section 3 states, “Congress hereby declares it to be a national goal to end chronic homelessness among veterans within a decade of the enactment of this act.”
1. Section 3, Subsection (b) states, “Congress hereby encourages all departments, and agencies of Federal, State, and local



governments, quasi-governmental organizations, private and public sector entities, including community-based organizations, faith based organizations, and individuals, to work cooperatively to end chronic homelessness among veterans within a decade.”

2. In section 2023 subsection (e) Congress defines an eligible veteran as, “A resident of a penal institution or an institution that provides long term care for mental illness is at risk for homelessness absent referral and counseling services provided under the demonstration program (as determined under guidelines established by the secretaries).”
  3. Identified in section 2022 titled “Coordination of outreach services for veterans at risk of homelessness” subsection (a) authorizes, “A coordinated plan for joint outreach to veterans at risk of homelessness, including particularly veterans who are being discharged or released from institutions after inpatient psychiatric care, substance abuse treatment, or imprisonment.”
- B. In staying within the confines of the “Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Act of 2001”, it is the responsibility of the State and Department of Corrections to provide the services like those implemented at San Quentin State Prison to all veterans incarcerated.
- C. It would be necessary to establish a position within the upper echelon of the Department of Corrections (i.e. headquarters) to coordinate the implementation of a Statewide veterans program which would ensure the compliance set forth by the Departments guidelines as stated in the Deputy Director memorandum 53/01: Dissemination of Information Regarding Veterans Benefits.
- D. To facilitate those programs such as the VIP and VIG into all institutions, it would require the implementation of a Veterans Information Project Coordinator in each facility.
1. In the past, these types of programs were coordinated under the Community Resources Office. However, in Fiscal-Year 2003-2004 the Community Resources Office’s were closed due to budget cuts by the Department of Corrections.
    - a. This had a devastating effect on these types of programs, as well as the coordination of other Inmate Programs being offered at each individual institution. I would strongly urge the re-implementation of the Community Resources

Managers position and re-centralization of community based programs.

2. In the absence of a Community Resources Office at each of the institutions, coordinator's can be a staff sponsor (like myself), a community volunteer, or a sponsor from a veteran's community based organization. In addition I recommend one inmate clerk be assigned to assist the VIP/VIG coordinator.
3. The Fiscal impact would be minimal to the Department of Corrections, compared to the fiscal impact of those veterans incarcerated re-offending and returning to State institutions.
4. A cost reduction for the Department of Corrections could be accomplished by having the V. A. provide medical care, medication, and therapeutic counseling services to those eligible veterans while incarcerated.

VI. Paroles:

- A. While there is veteran's benefits information being provided to paroling inmates, the goal of VIP and VIG is to make the veterans incarcerated aware of existing programs/services while pre-qualifying the veteran into specific programs within their community prior to being paroled.
- B. Further, the Board of Prison Terms needs to be educated in recognizing that these transitional programs meet all board requirement's for parole, and validate these programs as therapeutic and self-help in nature. The board should not use an individual's military history against the inmate at hearings for parole.

VII. Conclusion:

In conclusion, from its inception the VVGSQ has a long history of charitable donations. I can think of no greater donation than the time and energy that has been spent by these veterans incarcerated to set up programs like those being conducted at San Quentin State Prison.

These veterans incarcerated programs were requested, and formed, because veterans incarcerated wanted to ensure they received all benefits they were entitled to. Not only for their own personnel gain, but to assist them with the reintegration back into society.



The Veterans Information Project does just that. It gives the veterans incarcerated all possible information regarding benefits available and provides encouragement through positive contact, to ease transition back into society, and to reduce the recidivism of former members of the Armed Forces.

The Veterans Issues Group provides program participants the opportunity to participate in individual and group counseling session for personal and re-adjustment problems. Participants obtain assistance in addressing other needs such as medical treatment for military related problems, vocational and educational training, employment, and community reintegration planning, as well as enrolling participants to enter specific veteran programs in the community to assist in their parole plans.

As the authors of the Incarcerated Veterans Outreach Training Manual states, "Combat Veterans appear to be particularly at risk for incarceration and other types of contact with the criminal justice system. The number of veterans incarcerated is likely to increase in the coming years as the criminal justice system in the United States expands at a record rate." As shown in past conflicts, it can be expected that those veterans who are incarcerated will have an increased need for psychological treatment and other various benefits the V. A. offers to service personnel.

Finally as stated in the "Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Act of 2001", enacted but the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress, "Congress encourages all departments, and agencies of Federal, State, and local governments, quasi-governmental organizations to work cooperatively to end chronic homelessness among veterans within a decade." It is our responsibility as a State agency or quasi-governmental organization to ensure those veterans incarcerated are "Never Left Behind."

Thank you for this opportunity to address Veterans in Corrections, and those services which have been implemented at San Quentin State Prison with the help of Jeanne Woodford, Director, Department of Corrections and Jill L. Brown, Warden, San Quentin State Prison.