

**Department of Veterans' Affairs**  
**Budget 321**  
**Senate Bill Nos. 2007, 2344; House Bill Nos. 1405, 1439**

	<b>FTE Positions</b>	<b>General Fund</b>	<b>Other Funds</b>	<b>Total</b>
2013-15 legislative appropriation	8.00	\$1,715,703 <sup>1</sup>	\$0	\$1,715,703
2011-13 legislative appropriation	<u>7.00</u>	<u>1,417,219</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1,417,219</u>
2013-15 appropriation increase (decrease) to 2011-13 appropriation	1.00	\$298,484	\$0	\$298,484

<sup>1</sup>This amount includes \$295,000 of one-time funding. Excluding this amount, the agency's ongoing general fund appropriation is \$1,420,703.

**Item Description**

**Accrued leave payments** - In Section 1 of Senate Bill No. 2007, the Legislative Assembly identified \$10,123 from the general fund for accrued leave payments.

**One-time funding** - The Legislative Assembly in Section 2 of Senate Bill No. 2007 identified a total of \$45,000 from the general fund, of which \$15,000 is for website upgrades and \$30,000 is for two vans to transport veterans. The Legislative Assembly also provided in House Bill No. 1439 a one-time \$250,000 transfer from the general fund to the veterans' postwar trust fund to increase the principal balance of the fund.

**FTE positions** - The Legislative Assembly authorized 1 FTE national service officer position.

**Transport van replacement plan** - The Legislative Assembly in Section 8 of Senate Bill No. 2007 provided legislative intent that the Department of Veterans' Affairs prepare and provide a transport van replacement plan to the 64<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly and introduce legislation seeking state funding for the replacement of transport vans based on the plan.

**Stand down events** - The Legislative Assembly provided \$10,000 from the general fund for two "stand down" events to coordinate benefits and provide services to needy veterans in this state.

**Status/Result**

The Department of Veterans' Affairs has expended \$519 from the accrued leave payments line item for an employee resignation and has not determined whether a transfer from the accrued leave payments line item to the veterans' affairs line item will be necessary.

In addition to the \$15,000 provided by the Legislative Assembly in 2013 for website upgrades, the Department of Veterans' Affairs continued \$7,933 provided during the 2011-13 biennium for the department's website. To date, the department has spent \$12,655 for website improvements. The department anticipates most of the funding provided for the website will be spent.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs replaced one transport van in fall 2013 and will replace a second van in fall 2014. The department anticipates spending all of the funding available for transport vans.

The State Treasurer received the \$250,000 general fund transfer from the Office of Management and Budget for deposit into the veterans' postwar trust fund on July 17, 2013.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs filled the 1 FTE national service officer position in September 2013.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs has prepared an estimate of van replacements at each location in the state based on current monthly mileage and retirement at 150,000 miles. The department anticipates one van will need to be replaced during the 2015-17 biennium.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs has spent \$5,558 on stand down events to date. Sponsors have requested support for two additional stand down events in summer 2014. Remaining funds are not sufficient to support both events. The department anticipates all of the funding will be used for stand down events and will consider requesting increased funding for stand down events during the 2015-17 biennium.

**Services to North Dakota veterans exposed to Agent Orange** - The Legislative Assembly in House Bill No. 1405 provided a general fund appropriation of \$50,000 to the Department of Veterans' Affairs for grants to identify and provide services to North Dakota veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange. The department must provide a report to the Budget Section during the 2013-14 interim regarding any funds received; the status of the grant program, including information on the use of the grants awarded; and outcomes of the services provided.

**Veterans' service dog training** - The Legislative Assembly in Senate Bill No. 2344 provided a general fund appropriation of \$50,000 to the Department of Veterans' Affairs to train service dogs to assist North Dakota veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder. Payments may only be made upon the completion of a service dog's training and may not exceed \$12,500 per service dog. The department must provide a report to the Legislative Management during the 2013-14 interim regarding the status of the service dog training program, including benefits to veterans, number of applicants, and number of service dogs provided.

**State approving agency** - Currently, the North Dakota University System is the state approving agency in North Dakota for the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The primary responsibility of a state approving agency is to determine if an education or training program--offered within the state--is an appropriate way for veterans, active duty military, and their dependents to utilize their VA education benefits. As North Dakota's state approving agency, the University System is responsible for:

- Reviewing, evaluating, and approving programs based on state and federal criteria.
- Conduction onsite inspection visits to facilities requesting program approval.
- Conducting onsite compliance visits to approved facilities.
- Providing technical assistance.
- Engaging in outreach activities that foster use of the GI Bill.
- Helping military installations provide base personnel with educational opportunities.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs has placed ads on two billboards in the state and will schedule townhall events to raise awareness for the program. Several stakeholders are cooperating to bring the townhall events to each county. In addition, local veterans' clubs are publicizing the program and holding meetings regarding the Agent Orange grant program. Veterans needing services are referred to a county veterans' service officer. Through April 30, 2014, the department has spent \$29,447 on the program for advertising, outreach materials, and travel. The department anticipates all of the funding provided to identify and provide services to North Dakota veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange will be spent.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs is working with Service Dogs of America to implement the program and began accepting applicants for service dogs in April 2014. A board, including doctors, psychologists, and other members, will screen the applicants to determine which veterans will receive each of the four service dogs available through the program. The board will rank the applicants, and financial need will be considered. The department has not spent any of the funding available for the service dogs through March 2014. All available funding will be spent when the service dogs are deployed. The department anticipates veterans accepted into the program will be trained and take possession of the service dogs by October 2014.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs anticipates requesting a transfer of the state approving agency from the University System to the department during the 2015-17 biennium, including the transfer of 1 FTE position from the University System to the department. The department will also request federal funding authority related to the position.