



Veterans & Military Families Caucus

Democratic Party of New Mexico

HB2

GENERAL APPROPRIATION
ACT OF 2023

Representative Nathan Small
Representative Meredith Dixon



Why VMFC supports HB2

Veterans and military families are a major contributor to New Mexico's economy. They earned their benefits and deserve quality services like access to healthcare, transportation, employment and housing, and assistance with disability claims, retirement and more.

DVS is the advocate for veterans and helps veterans navigate through a very challenging VA system. With **current FTE staffing levels** and **vacant VSO positions** statewide, this leaves both urban and rural veterans struggling to find help with their earned veteran and statewide benefits.

Oftentimes the **veterans and their surviving spouses and families fall through the cracks** and give up or end up feeling betrayed by veteran's service organizations.

Voting **YES on HB2** with **more funding added** would make DVS more effective in its mission and let veterans know that New Mexico values their sacrifice and service.

More than 141,000 veterans were living in New Mexico as of 2020. Veterans represent **8.8% of New Mexico's civilian population** 18 and older. That number continues to grow as retiring veterans look to retire in states with a lower cost of living.

Seventy percent of our veterans are aged 55 years and older. Healthcare, transportation, education, housing assistance and constituent services play a **critical** role in their well-being and that of their families.

There are simply **not enough Veteran Service Officers (VSOs)** in New Mexico. We are the 5th largest state (land mass) and many of our veterans live in rural areas. Hiring more VSO's will afford us the opportunity to more effectively help our rural area veterans.

We often hear from veterans how these VSO caseworkers have made such a difference getting them into counseling and treatment that **literally has saved their lives**. We also hear that there should be more of them and that they should be more accessible.

Veterans disability benefits and military retirement **help bolster** New Mexico's **economy**.

New Mexico ranks **46th out of 51** (plus D.C.) in veteran expenditures, averaging only **\$24 per veteran per year**, while the overall average is **\$216**. In the ten states with similar populations, the average is **\$145** and New Mexico ranks **second to the last**.

Please consider providing DVS a budget that can **raise New Mexico out of the lowest ranks of states** in their support of veterans.

\$7.9 million won't do it. DVS needs more.

Please refer to the data on the back of this sheet.

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Peer States		Total Population	Percent Veterans	Dollars per Veteran	Rank among Peers
32	Iowa	3,190,369	7.7	568	1
33	Nevada	3,104,614	9.1	158	3
34	Arkansas	3,011,524	8.6	132	5
35	Mississippi	2,961,279	7.3	30	8
36	Kansas	2,937,880	8.1	134	4
37	New Mexico	2,117,522	9.1	24	9
38	Nebraska	1,961,504	8.2	33	7
39	Idaho	1,839,106	9.1	279	2
40	West Virginia	1,793,716	9	74	6
41	Hawaii	1,455,271	9.5	18	10

Sources:

https://www.dws.state.nm.us/Portals/0/DM/LMI/2021_Veterans_Profile.pdf

<https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/innovation-in-state-level-veterans-services-a-comprehensive-review-case-highlights-and-an-agenda-for-enhanced-state-impact.pdf>